

HOME CINEMA

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Choice

GROUPTEST
Smart LED 3D
TVs battle
it out



White stars

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HCP system, p58

Sony's best yet!

55in Bravia & 4K projector
blow us away

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Pioneer VSX-922
Runco LightStyle LS-1
Iomega TV with Boxee
Samsung HW-E551
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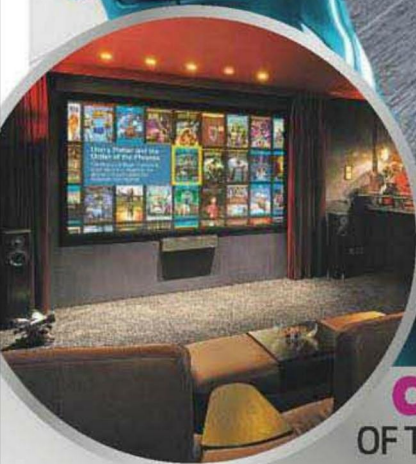
■ UNDERWORLD:
AWAKENING 3D ■ HAYWIRE
■ DIE HARD QUADRLOGY
■ TRUE BLOOD: SEASON 4

Top 10 3D

Got a 3DTV? These are
the Blu-rays you must own

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07



***"Simply the best pound-for-pound speaker package
of any type we've tested"***

What Hi-Fi? Sound And Vision, October 2011



The New 7000 Series

**At last, a great looking, 5.1 'Style' loudspeaker package
that's so good you'll even enjoy listening to your music.**

Surely all home cinema speakers also play music equally well? The answer is sadly not. Reviewer after reviewer criticise the sonic performance of many home cinema style speakers when playing music. Quite simply such speakers are just not good enough. Their sonic shortcomings degrade movie soundtracks just the same as their musical performances.

The new 7000 Series speakers completely solve this problem. They're so good they'll delight everyone; movie enthusiasts, gamers and music lovers alike.

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EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor Mark Craven
News Editor Anton van Beek
Art Editor John Rook

CONTRIBUTORS

Richard Stevenson, Adrian Justins, Steve May, John Archer,
Adam Rayner, Danny Phillips, Martin Pipe,
Photography Mike Prior, Claire Collins

ADVERTISING

Senior Advertising Executive Jack O'Sullivan
Tel: 01689 869 854
E-mail: jack.o.sullivan@myhobbystore.com
AVTech Advertising Manager Sonia Lawrence
Tel: 01689 869 899
E-mail: sonia.lawrence@myhobbystore.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions manager Paul Molyneux
UK: New, renewals and enquiries
Tel: 0845 677 7807
E-mail: hcc@subscription.co.uk
USA & CANADA: New, renewals and enquiries
Tel: (001) 877 363 1310
E-mail: expsmag@expressmag.com
REST OF WORLD: New, renewals and enquiries
Tel: +44 (0)8456 777 807

BACK ISSUES

Tel: 0844 848 8822
From outside the UK: +44 (0)1689 869896
E-mail: customer.services@myhobbystore.com

MANAGEMENT TEAM

Group Editor Paul Miller, paul.miller@avtechmedia.co.uk
Group Sales Manager Duncan Armstrong
Head of Design and Production Julie Miller
E-commerce Manager Amanda Lee
Chief Executive Owen Davies
Chairman Peter Harkness

Published by MyHobbyStore Ltd

Hadlow House, 9 High Street, Green Street Green,
Orpington, Kent, BR6 6BG
Tel: 0844 412 2262
From outside the UK: +44 (01689) 869896
E-mail: customer.services@myhobbystore.com
www.myhobbystore.com

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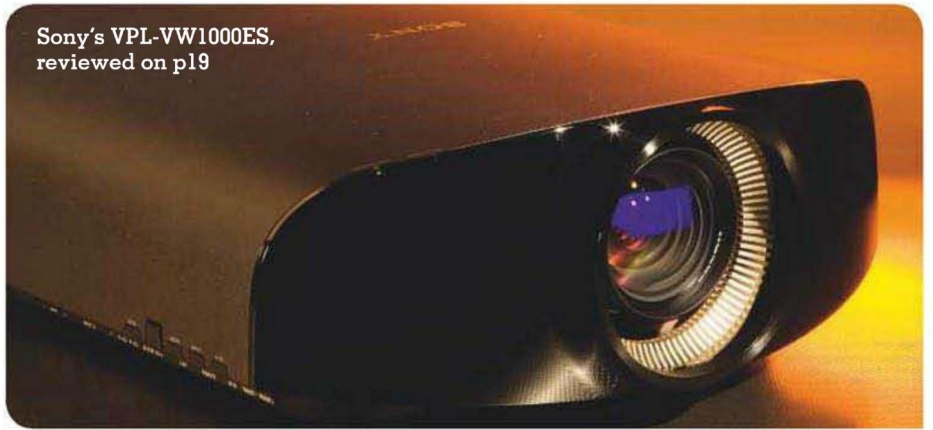
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Sony's VPL-VW1000ES,
reviewed on p19



WELCOME

Sony's VPL-VW1000ES, reviewed on p19, gives us a glimpse of what the next stage of home cinema could

look like – Blu-rays and DVDs upscaled to 4K

resolution for an even more impressive image. But is

upsampling alone good enough? No! We want native 4K movie

content – and getting that seems to be a tricky proposition.

Speaking recently to members of Panasonic's Japanese R&D

team, it's clear that the idea of 4K Blu-ray discs hasn't been

abandoned, but it's **the movie studios that need to be**

persuaded there's a market for such a format.

And to do that will require a consumer base of 4K

displays, be they TVs or projectors – in the same way that

Blu-ray only arrived once hi-def TVs were widespread. So, while

products like Sony's high-end projector show that video is

moving beyond the boundaries of Full HD, we're in for a long

wait for genuine 4K content. Until then, we'll just have to

carry on upscaling!

Editor

Mark Craven



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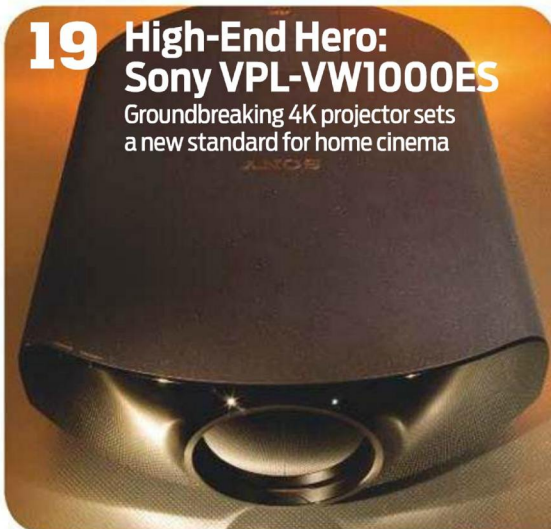
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Martin Pipe:

Technical expert Martin is renowned throughout the home cinema industry



Richard Stevenson:

Industry veteran and former Editor of UK CE trade journal ERT



Steve May:

HCC's former Editor-in-Chief is one of the UK's most respected AV journo's



John Archer:

The UK's most experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



Danny Phillips:

Former editor of *What Video & High-Definition TV* and dedicated AV boffin



Adrian Justins:

Made his name as the editor of *What Video & TV* and *What Home Cinema*





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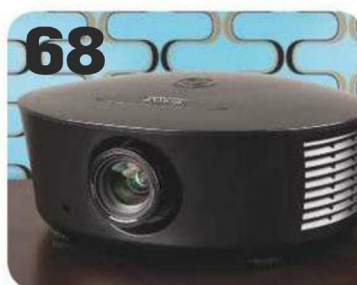
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COVER STORY

COVER STORY

COVER STORY



ELECTRA 1000 Be II

They say perfection is not of this world...

Don't believe what they say. If music is your passion, you should listen to the Electra 1000 Be II loudspeakers. Universally recognized by reviewers, recording and mastering studios, the world over, the Electra 1000 Be II loudspeakers are coveted by the most demanding audiophiles. One aspect of the design is the unique Focal inverted dome tweeter. This has convinced the most renowned recording and mastering studios across the world. This technology - the unique patented inverted dome High Frequency unit - made from rare, aerospace-grade beryllium - a material which is a hundred times more expensive than gold. The High Frequency dome material weighs just twenty-five thousandths of a gram and its material is seven times more rigid than titanium. These characteristics, combined with the powerful motor system, deliver outstanding acceleration, excellent dispersion and a with uniform frequency response from 2kHz to over 40kHz. Performance achievements that we're proud of, but in the end there's only one true measure of performance: trust your heart. Take a listen.

Photo: L'Espresso, Sylvain Madelon - St-Etienne

Beryllium

BULLETIN

→ **News highlights** **CABASSE** Entry-level speaker range gets high-end tech **SMART TV** Do consumers really care about online functionality? **TWONKY** Media server specialist has its head in the clouds **PANASONIC** End of the road for eco? **NEWS X10** The hottest news stories in bite-size chunks **JOHN CARTER** Blu-ray sci-fi spectacular is out of this world **AND MUCH MORE!**

Pitch perfect

Sony STR-DA5700ES → www.panasonic.co.uk

Get ready to experience film soundtracks 'just as the director intended' with Sony's new flagship 7.2-channel AV receiver (expandable to 9.2 by adding front height speakers). The latest addition to the brand's premium ES range, the DA5700 will set you back around £2,000 and features a 'Vocal Height Mode' to enhance dialogue reproduction, plus proprietary calibration tech.



HCC Online...

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Partner with...

Yamaha RX-V473

Feature-packed AV receiver
£340 approx



It might be positioned at the less costly end of Yamaha's new range of AVRs, but that doesn't mean the RX-V473 is light on features. As well as the brand's traditional audio know-how, the device also offers 4k2k pass-through, Apple-friendly direct digital connection and a new Eco mode that promises to lower power consumption by 20 per cent. <http://uk.yamaha.com>

MT gesture

Cabasse MT31 → www.cabasse.com/eng

These new MT31 loudspeakers bring some of Cabasse's high-end audio magic to the entry-level market, in the form of a new mid-range tweeter drive unit derived from tech developed for its flagship La Sphère and L'Océan models. Available in a choice of Wenge and Maple finishes, the line-up consists of new versions of the Antigua stand-mount (£460 per pair), Tobago, Jersey and Alderney floorstanders (£600/£800/£1,100 per pair), Socca centre (£300) and Orion sub (£550).

Small wonder



After demonstrating a prototype at ISE

2012 in January, Imerge has released its new High Definition Mini Client playback device designed to suit installations where space is at a premium. Weighing just 450g and smaller than two DVD cases, the Mini Client works in conjunction with the company's new MSI-3D media server (reviewed in *HCC* 208) to offer local playback of DVDs, music and 2D HD movies, including HD audio. The Mini Client is supplied with VESA 75/100 mounts so that it can be mounted or hidden behind a TV.

www.imerge.co.uk

Playing with B&O



Bang & Olufsen is setting out to target 'the young digital enthusiast' (whoever that might be) with

its new BeoPlay V1. The first TV to feature in the premium brand's Play range, the LED-lit V1 is available in a choice of 32in and 42in screen sizes, with prices starting at a surprisingly affordable £2,000. While the TV has a full range of connective options (including five HDMI inputs), it's been specifically designed to allow an Apple TV box to be attached directly to the rear of the unit. Class D ICE power amps ensure some meaty audio as well.

www.beoplay.com

Size-zero PVR



Set-top box maker EchoStar has launched

what it claims to be the world's slimmest Freeview HD PVR. Despite measuring a tiny 14mm high, the £260 HDT-610R still packs in a 500GB hard drive, twin Freeview HD tuners, access to BBC iPlayer via its Ethernet port and on-demand content via Box Office 365. 'We pride ourselves on challenging the status quo to create truly inspiration products [and] the ultra slim box represents the coming of age for the DVR,' claims EchoStar Europe Senior VP and GM Rhod Williams.

www.myechostar.com

UK consumers not so Smart

New survey shows a quarter of Smart TV owners never go online

While sales of Smart or 'connected' TVs continue to rise, a recent survey by YouGov has shown that UK buyers are not necessarily making the most of them. In fact, only 37 per cent of those who said they are planning to buy a Smart TV intend to use it to go online.

This figure is slightly mitigated by the fact that only 25 per cent of existing Smart TV owners had never made use of its connected services, which implies that while you may think you'll never find yourself browsing YouTube on your telly, you probably will. However, when Smart TV owners were asked what the most important features of their television was, 96 per cent said 'picture quality', followed by screen size (93 per cent) and sound quality (89 per cent).

'The Smart part of a Smart TV is not yet the main reason people are buying them; it's more about future-proofing their TV set in the same way that lots of people bought HD TVs even



Dan Brilot: 'Early adopters of Smart TV are buying them to own the latest gadget'

before HD channels were available,' says YouGov's Media Consulting Director Dan Brilot. 'I think many early adopters of Smart TV are buying them for the sake of owning the latest gadget.'

Ready to bite

The survey reports that Sony currently leads the Smart TV market with a 36 per cent share, compared to 33 per cent for Samsung and 16 per cent for Panasonic. Yet Samsung is the brand of choice for 62 per cent of people planning to buy a Smart TV in the next year.

Brilot explains Samsung's surge: 'Samsung is the brand working the hardest and most successfully to bring Smart TV to the masses through its advertising campaigns, as well as leading the way in the availability of apps on the sets.'

Perhaps the most shocking part of the YouGov survey is that 26 per cent of respondents say they are planning to buy an Apple TV – even though the iCompany has yet to launch it, let alone officially confirm that it is making one. Apple is also seen as the 'most stylish and innovative' Smart TV brand and Hitachi as the most outdated. Hardly surprising, as Hitachi, as far as *HCC* is aware, doesn't actually make Smart TVs...



This is what most people aren't seeing, apparently

Playlist...

Team *HCC* reveals its Playback picks of the last month

Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol (All-region BD)

Not quite the best film in the series, but the action looks and sounds fantastic in hi-def



American Dad! Vol. 1 (R2 DVD)



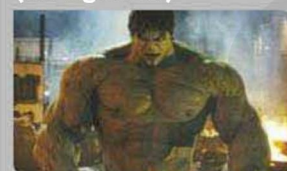
Another three discs of irreverent hilarity from Seth MacFarlane's animated sitcom

Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City (Xbox 360/PS3/PC)



Despite a rotten single-player mode, this spin-off really comes into its own when played online

The Incredible Hulk (All-region BD)



The not-so-jolly green giant's role in *Avengers Assemble* prompted a revisit of this overlooked flick

Resident Evil: Afterlife (All-region BD)



The combination of a new game (see above) and our 3D Blu-ray feature (p36) was all the excuse we needed to dust off this spectacular stereoscopic disc for yet another spin. Excellent

«Rewind

What was hot in home cinema a decade ago?

Find out as we peel back the pages on the July 2002 issue of HCC...

Denon's top-of-the-range AVC-AISR hogged the prime spot on the magazine cover and left the HCC team wondering if anybody could handle the power of the company's debut THX Ultra2-certified home cinema amp.



Help was on hand for readers worrying about the audio performance of their AV systems. HCC stalwart Adam Rayner revealed ten demo scenes from the Dolby Digital EX-encoded DVD of Steven Spielberg's *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* that could be used to 'analyse your home cinema like an expert'.

Following the collapse of ITV Digital it was time to find out if there was a future for IPTV. Unsurprisingly, all of the industry bigwigs we spoke to thought there was, particularly when it came to free-to-air channels.

Twonky debuts mobile apps

UltraViolet-compatible cloud-based solution also in the works

Popular media server specialist Twonky is extending its networking tentacles out of the home with the launch of two apps for mobile devices and the development of a new cloud-based solution.

With the release of the Twonky Beam app, users of AirPlay, uPnP and DLNA equipment can take internet-streamed video content from an iPad or Android tablet and view it elsewhere on a TV screen. For example, if watching *The Apprentice* on the iPlayer on an iPad, the Beam app allows the user to push the antics of Lord Sugar's wannabes on to any number of display devices connected to the iPad's network. Playback and volume can be controlled by the tablet whilst other videos can be queued or saved for later.

The tablet can still be used for other functions such as web browsing whilst beaming videos to a TV. Twonky Beam also works with audio and photographs, and there are plans to extend the function to music services such as Spotify.

The sky's the limit

Another app, Twonky Mobile, converts tablets and smartphones into sophisticated remote controls able to pull content from a media library on one connected device and display it on another.

When HCC caught up with Rick Schwartz, Director of Connected



Rick Schwartz: 'You'll be able to show two or three movies from the cloud in different rooms at the same time'

Home Software for Twonky's maker Packet Video, he also revealed that the company is working on a cloud-based solution compatible with the fledgling UltraViolet standard. 'Twonky has always supported higher-quality file formats such

as FLAC and MKV,' he says, 'and we are encouraging the storing of Blu-rays in the cloud.' UltraViolet allows owners of Blu-rays and DVDs to store a virtual copy of a movie in the great server in the sky and watch it on any connected device. 'With Twonky you'll be able to show two or three movies from the cloud in different rooms at the same time,' explains Schwartz.

The company is also working with leading automotive entertainment manufacturers (including Harman) to develop a

vehicle-based server. 'In the future you'll be able to sync albums and songs from your cloud-based tunes by Bluetooth or just by entering a Wi-Fi hotspot,' divulges Schwartz.

Twonky: New apps turn smartphones and tablets into a remote



Poe-faced thrills



As well as being one of America's most celebrated authors of the macabre and mysterious, did you also know that Edgar Allan Poe went head-to-head with a 19th Century serial killer? Okay, so that didn't happen in real life. But it is the basis for *The Raven*, a gruesome thriller starring John Cusack as the writer and directed by James 'V for Vendetta' McTeigue. The film arrives on Blu-ray and DVD in the UK on July 30, and a quick poke around the BBFC website shows that several extras have been submitted including a commentary and six extended scenes. www.universalpictures.co.uk

'To boldly go...'



It looks like the recent *Star Trek: The Next Generation – The Next Level* Blu-ray sampler did its job and shown to Paramount that there is a sizeable market out there for a hi-def release of the popular sci-fi show. The studio has now confirmed that it will be bringing *Star Trek: The Next Generation – Season One* to Blu-ray in the UK on July 23. Fans can look forward to a six-disc set featuring new HD remasters of every episode accompanied by DTS-HD MA 7.1 remixed audio, plus a host of extras including a three-part documentary and five featurettes. www.paramountpictures.co.uk

Woman trouble



Lionsgate is bringing David Cronenberg's latest film to Blu-ray and DVD in the UK on June 25. But any fans expecting more of the filmmaker's trademark body horror should prepare for a more cerebral piece of cinema. *A Dangerous Method* is based on the friendship between psychiatrist Carl Jung (Michael Fassbender) and his mentor Sigmund Freud (Viggo Mortensen), and the disturbed young woman (Kiera Knightley) who came between them. Extras on both the BD and DVD take the form of a director's commentary and *Making of...* doc. www.lionsgatefilms.co.uk

Illicit action

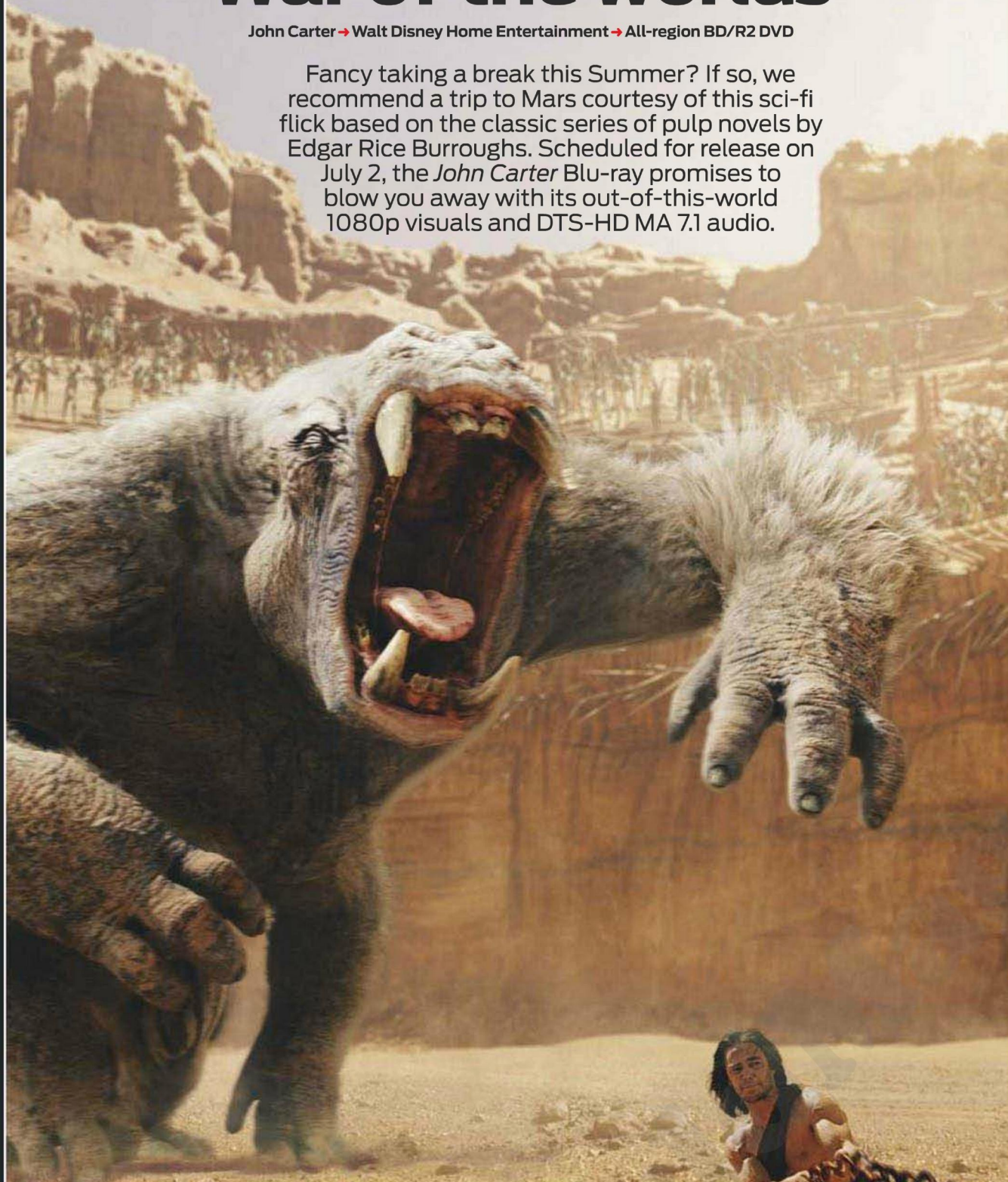


Mark Wahlberg embarks on an adrenaline-fuelled race through the criminal underworld in *Contraband*. This fast-paced thriller casts Wahlberg as a reformed criminal dragged back into his old life when he realises how far he's willing to go to keep his family safe from harm. Universal Pictures is bringing the film to Blu-ray and DVD in the UK on July 9. Extras on the BD version include U-Control picture-in-picture content, a commentary track, deleted scenes, two behind-the-scenes featurettes and an UltraViolet Digital Copy of the film. www.universalpictures.co.uk

War of the worlds

John Carter → Walt Disney Home Entertainment → All-region BD/R2 DVD

Fancy taking a break this Summer? If so, we recommend a trip to Mars courtesy of this sci-fi flick based on the classic series of pulp novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Scheduled for release on July 2, the *John Carter* Blu-ray promises to blow you away with its out-of-this-world 1080p visuals and DTS-HD MA 7.1 audio.



Tech Diary

Our calendar is here to make sure you don't miss out...

→ JUNE

1: Prometheus

Ridley Scott makes a belated return to the science-fiction genre with this 3D prequel to his 1979 classic *Alien*. Track it down at cinemas across the UK from today to see if it was worth the wait. www.fox.co.uk

11: J. Edgar



Clint Eastwood directs Leonardo DiCaprio in this biopic of the controversial head of the FBI. The film arrives on DVD and Blu-ray in the UK today. www.warnerbros.co.uk

13: InfoComm 2012

The Las Vegas Convention Center opens its doors today to this three-day event that promises to be 'the most energizing audiovisual gathering in the world!'. www.infocommshow.org



15: Jaws

Just when you thought it was safe to go back to the multiplex... Spielberg's legendary blockbuster returns to UK cinemas today in the form of a brand-new digital restoration, undertaken as part of Universal's centenary celebrations. www.universalpictures.co.uk

19: Digital Home World Summit

The Connected-Home World Summit gets a new name for 2012, but continues to offer a conference agenda dedicated to the crossover of TVs and portable devices, and how to get the best consumer experience out of both. www.the-connected-home.com

25: Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance 3D

Today sees the UK Blu-ray and DVD release of this stereoscopic sequel for Marvel's supernatural biker. Can it improve on the rather lacklustre original? With the directors of *Crank* behind it, we certainly hope so. www.entertainmentone.co.uk

28: HCC #210

Your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands today, packed with hardware tests, features, outspoken opinion and full-on software reviews. www.homecinemachoice.com

Panasonic calls time on Eco

Tech giant pulls the plug on green tech when it comes to plasma

Panasonic has pulled the plug on its energy efficiency drive, declaring it's time to get back to the business of improving the image quality of its Neo plasma TVs.

Speaking exclusively to *HCC*, the engineering team behind the brand's high-spec VT50 models say they've gone about as far as they need to when it comes to satisfying increasingly stringent global energy-efficiency standards.

Markus Wagenseil, Panasonic's European product marketing manager, believes that the company has reduced the power consumption of its big plasmas sufficiently to comply with even the toughest green trading restrictions. 'We've gone far enough. Consumers buy plasma for the picture quality benefits, not because they have power consumption concerns.'

The announcement follows a concerted drive by the manufacturer to curb the energy-hogging excesses of its largest panels. 'With a growing emphasis on LED, the time is right to ease off on the eco message,' says Wagenseil. 'People who want to buy LED are never going to buy plasma, no matter how energy-efficient we make it. People will only buy it for superior picture quality.'

The enthusiast's choice

According to Fabrice Estornel, senior manager with Panasonic's UK Visual Marketing Group, 'steady improvements in panel efficiency have enabled us to concentrate on improving picture quality. As a result we have a brighter picture on our plasma models this year.'

The volte-face is all part of a bigger change in TV strategy for the brand. For 2012 LED has been given greater prominence in the range, with plasma positioned as a high-end option. 'We are very happy to have an alternative to plasma, and so far reaction has been positive,' says Estornel. He adds the brand cannot rule out expanding its



Markus Wagenseil: 'People buy plasma TVs for picture quality benefits, not due to power consumption concerns'

LED TV line-up further next

year. And, adds, Wagenseil, 'it's about giving buyers a full choice. The mass market today is clearly on LED LCD, so we are positioning plasma as the screen of choice for enthusiasts. That's why we are focusing on picture quality.'

The change in tactic comes against a backdrop of mounting economic pressures. But Estornel says there's no chance that the company will stop making televisions. 'There are issues but we are fixing them. TV is still a key technology for us and we're not leaving this business. We intend to go for it big time.' However, Estornel confirmed that the brand has reduced its plasma production capacity.



Panasonic VT50 plasma: Smarter, better, brighter for 2012

Untainted audio



It's been a long time coming, but Audiolab

has finally released a successor to its 8000AP preamp/processor. The new 8200AP will set you back around £1,250 and while the company claims that it hasn't set out to 'impress with a never-ending list of features and formats', it still looks tailor-made to get the very best out of your audio. Amongst the improvements are HDMI 1.4 with 3D passthrough, new jitter reduction circuitry and the ability to bypass processing on analogue and digital inputs to maintain signal purity. www.audiolab.co.uk

echoBox of tricks



Is your home internet access plagued by drop-outs and slow downs caused by over-saturated

Wi-Fi connections? If so, Asheridge Communications claims to have an affordable solution. Its new £70 echoBox sets out to solve the problem by piggybacking onto existing coaxial TV aerial wiring to deliver an Ethernet internet connection at any aerial point. Asheridge's Jason Dando believes the echoBox is ideal for Smart TV users, specifically noting the 'performance of VOD and services such as Film4 and BBC iPlayer is not compromised'. www.ethernetovercoax.co.uk

Dolby downloads



Onkyo and Dolby have launched the world's

first Dolby TrueHD 5.1 music download platform. Currently available in Japan, the e-onkyo service allows users to download music from 100 albums (roughly 1,000 tracks) in Dolby TrueHD 5.1 via Onkyo's 2012 range of AV receivers, including the TX-NR717 (pictured). Downloads are available in WAV and FLAC formats at 24-bit/96 kHz and 24-bit/192 kHz quality, priced at the equivalent of £24 per album and £4 per single. The service is expected to go worldwide in the Autumn. <http://music.e-onkyo.com>

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This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



1 Frame rate woes

Peter Jackson has spent a lot of time talking about shooting *The Hobbit* at 48fps instead of the usual 24. But it wasn't until the recent CinemaCon expo that anybody outside of the production actually saw the results – and the lukewarm reaction presumably wasn't what Jackson hoped for. One projectionist told the *LA Times* that 'It looked like a made-for-TV movie', while SlashFilm.com's Peter Sciretta wrote, 'It looked like when you turn your LCD TV to the 120-hertz up-conversion setting'

However, Jackson is still confident. 'There can only ever be a real truthful reaction when people have a chance to actually see a complete narrative on a particular film,' he said.

2 Pirate Bay blocked

The High Court has ordered UK internet service providers Sky, Everything Everywhere, TalkTalk, O2 and Virgin Media to block access to Swedish file-sharing site The Pirate Bay. BT has requested 'a few more weeks' to consider its position to the block.

3 LG boosts profits

While other manufacturers continue to struggle financially, things are looking pretty rosy for LG. The company's home entertainment division saw its operating profit for January-March of this year hit \$192million, almost double that of Q1 2011.

4 Panny's free film deal

Until July 21, Panasonic is offering free copies of *Ice Age 3*, *Die Hard 4.0* and *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* to consumers who buy any of its 2012 line-up of Smart Blu-ray players, Blu-ray recorders and Blu-ray systems. For more info visit the Panasonic website.

5 Sony gets Netflix (sort of)

On-demand movie service Netflix was finally added to the Sony Entertainment Network at the end of April. However, Sony also confirmed that the upgrade only applies to its 2012 Smart products, not older devices.

6 Fox switches to digital

The theatrical division of 20th Century Fox used the recent CinemaCon event in the US to announce that it would be moving exclusively to digital distribution within the next two years. Fox is the first major Hollywood studio to announce a timeframe for ditching 35mm film prints in favour of a digital-only distribution model, but we expect plenty more to follow in its footsteps in the very near future.

7 Copyright Act delayed

The controversial Digital Economy Act has encountered yet another roadblock and looks set to be delayed until at least 2014. Speaking to the BBC, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has confirmed that measures proposed under the Act will not be implemented for another two years. Unsurprisingly, the delay has been received warmly by the Internet Service Providers' Association.

8 Extra Hi-def

The BBC has revealed that Freeview users will be able to access an additional channel of hi-def content during the 2012 Olympics. Thanks to some newly-released digital space, BBC One HD and BBC HD will be joined by a hi-def simulcast of the Beeb's

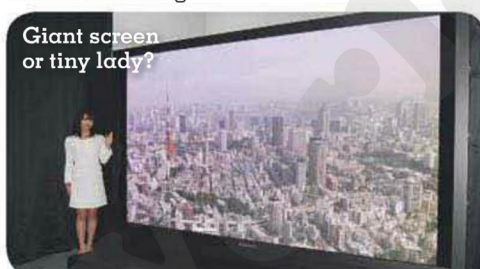
Red Button service during this Summer's games.

9 B&W nabs royal award

British loudspeaker specialist Bowers & Wilkins has scooped the Queen's Award for Enterprise in Innovation as a result of its development of the synthetic Diamond Dome Tweeter. The company previously bagged a Queen's Award for Enterprise back in 2005 for its Nautilus tube-loaded tweeters. We guess Her Majesty just loves those high-frequency effects.

10 8K record breaker

Panasonic and NHK have joined forces to create the world's largest Super Hi-Vision plasma. To create this mammoth 145in 8K (7680 x 4320) display, the two companies had to develop an entirely new drive tech to ensure uniform picture quality free from flickering.



Premiere

HCC's guide to what's happening in the world of TV and films...

The Iron lady

Rebecca Hall is in talks to play 'a sexy scientist every bit as smart as Tony Stark' in Shane Black's upcoming *Iron Man 3*. Andy Lau, Guy Pearce and Ben Kingsley are also rumoured to be playing scientists in the film, although possibly not sexy ones.

Hulk is a smash



In other superhero news, rumours are rife that the Hulk might be getting ready to embark on a third attempt at solo success at the box office. Apparently, Marvel Studios bosses have been 'pleasantly surprised by the phenomenal response' to the character in *Avengers Assemble*.

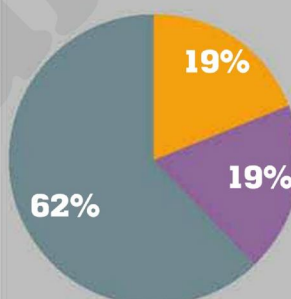
Spooky Sam

MGM has hired Sam Raimi to fill the shoes of Steven Spielberg and act as producer on the studio's upcoming remake of the 1982 horror classic *Poltergeist*. This surely makes the likelihood of an appearance in the film by fellow *Evil Dead* veteran Bruce Campbell a virtual certainty.

We asked...

How often do you spend money on downloading or streaming films from VOD services?

■ Frequently
■ Sometimes ■ Never

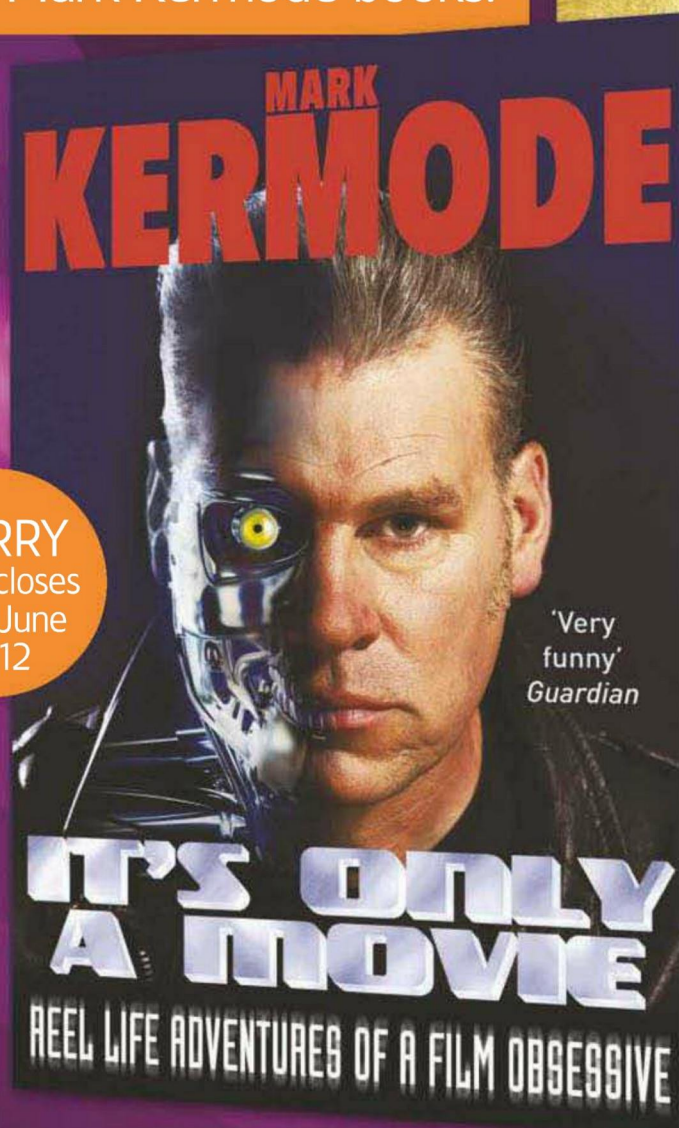


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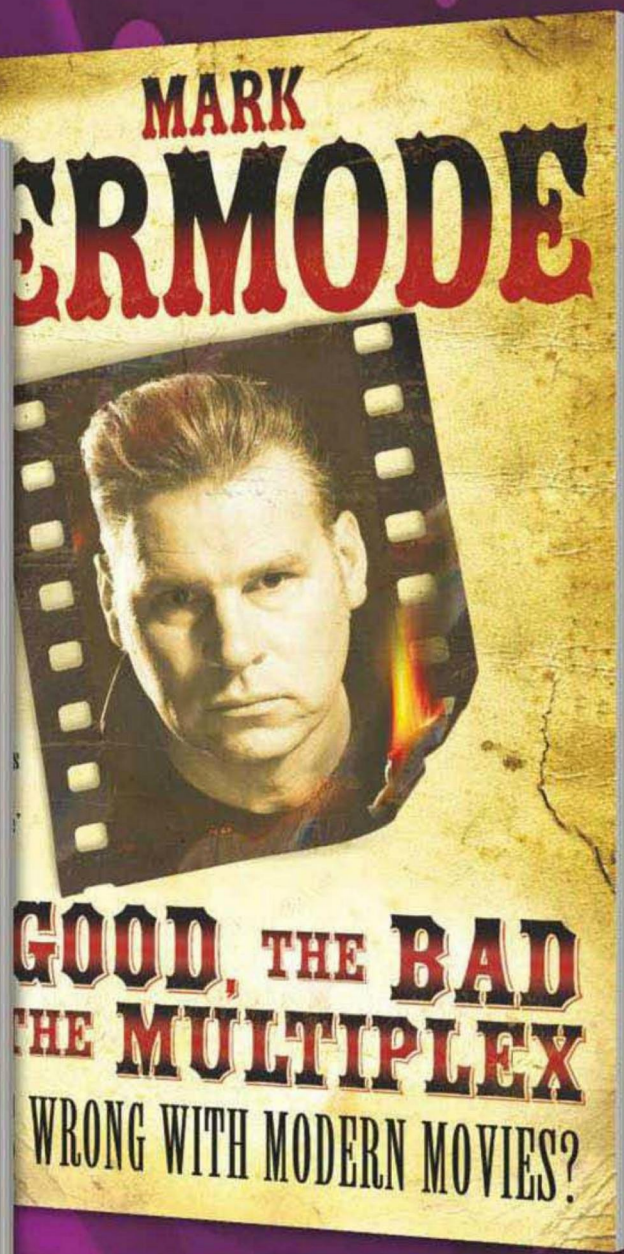
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'Very
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Guardian



It's Only A Movie:

Reel Life Adventures Of A Film Obsessive

Mark Kermode takes us into the weird world of a life lived in widescreen. Join him as he gets lost in Russia on the trail of a low-budget horror flick, gasp as he's shot at in Hollywood and cheer as he gets thrown out of the Cannes film festival. This compelling cinematic memoir is genuinely 'inspired by real events'.

The Good, The Bad and The MultiPlex, *What's Wrong with Modern Movies?*

The incomparable Mark Kermode asks 'What's wrong with modern movies?' Outspoken, opinionated and hilariously funny, this book is a must for anyone who has ever sat in an undermanned, overpriced cinema and asked themselves: 'How the hell did things get to be this terrible?'

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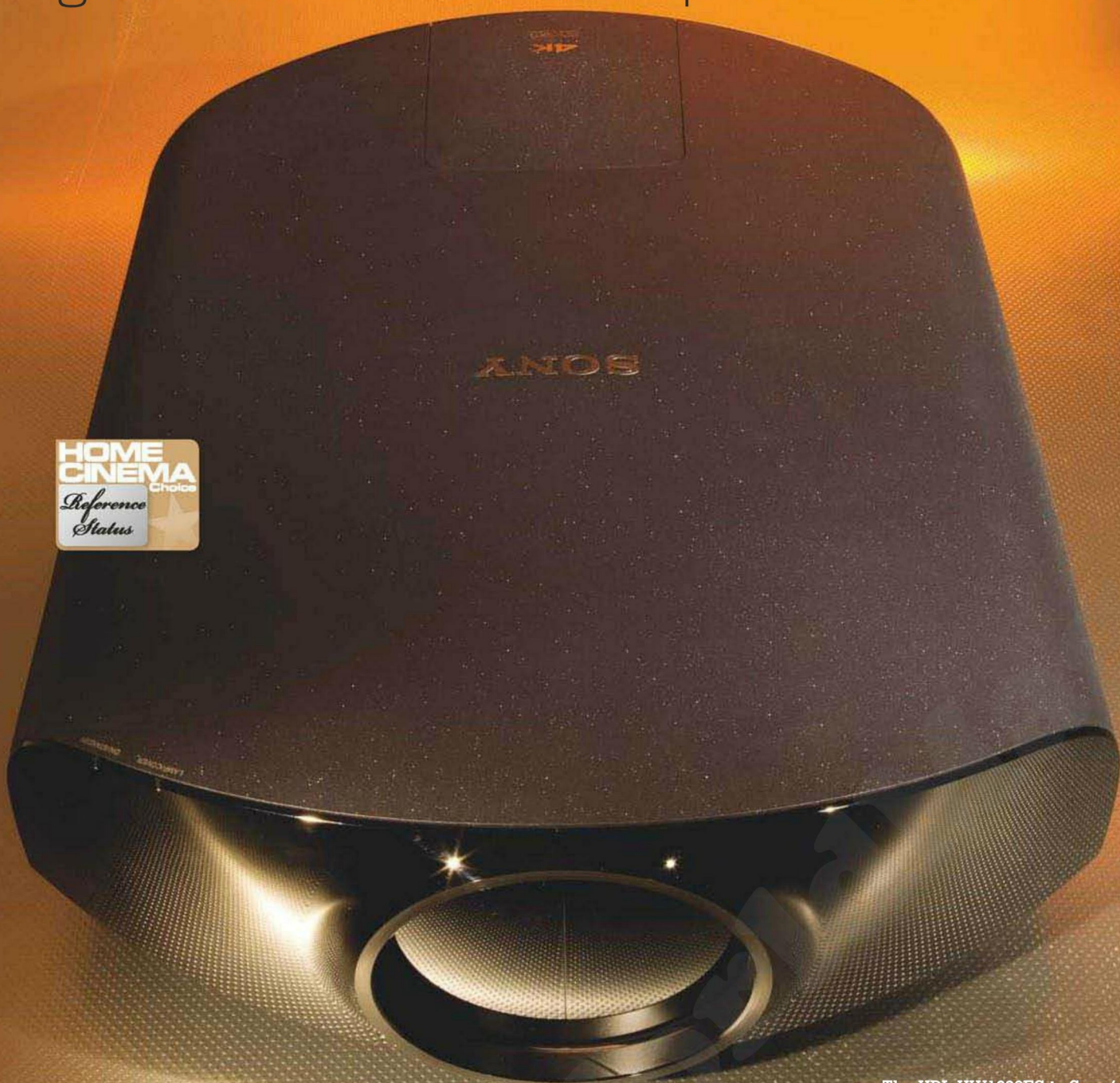


www.cypeurope.com

SONY VPL-VW1000ES → £16,800 APPROX

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Able to display video at four times the resolution of its Full HD competitors, Sony's VPL-VW1000ES represents the new high ground of home theatre performance...



The VPL-VW1000ES is Sony's most ambitious home cinema product yet

'If you've got £17,000 burning
a hole in your pocket,
stop reading now and
go slap down a deposit'

Our reviewer **Steve May** can remember the days of CRT projectors the size of small cars. Back then the prospect of 4K video seemed like pure science fiction



Those seeking the visual equivalent of fine-dining are traditionally best served at a 4K digital cinema. An eight-million pixel image, spread large and bristling with detail, is a feast for the eyes befitting the planet's premiere cinemas. But now cineasts have another choice – they can invest in the first consumer 4K projector and have a Quad HD cinema all their own. Yet, without access to a 4K video source, is there any point in shelling out the best part of £17,000 to own one?

In the home entertainment world, the VPL-VW1000ES is a lonely pioneer. It shouldn't be confused with JVC's much cheaper DLA-X90 and X70 D-ILA models, which also fly the 4K flag, albeit as part of their marketing spiel. This is actually a reference to e-Shift optical jiggery-pokery rather than actual resolution; their output is still very much Full HD. By contrast, this Sony model dispenses genuine Quad HD.

While small compared to a commercial 4K light cannon, the VPL-VW1000ES is a fair size in the context of domestic cinema. Some 520mm wide and 640mm deep, and tipping the scales at a not inconsiderable 20kg, it requires no small effort to ceiling mount. The thing looks beautiful, though, with a matt crackle black finish and gloss fascia; the centrally positioned lens, with its distinctive ribbed collar, is protected by an automatic motorised shutter.

The ARC-F (All-Range Crisp Focus) lens within has been developed specifically for this model, in order to maintain focus and combat aberrations right to its edge. Having optics able to serve Quad HD is a key (and expensive) difference between this model and Full HD contenders. After all, there's no point trying to deliver a 4K image to the screen if it doesn't make it through the lens unscathed.

The exhaust vents are located on the rear, sucking cool air in on one side and expelling it hot on the other. Inputs and control interfaces are aligned down the lower left-hand side. Ingress can be via two HDMI inputs, component and PC VGA. Controls options include RS-232C and a pair of 12V triggers; there's also an RJ45 to add an additional 3D sync blaster to cover larger venues (should the one built into the lens assembly fail to reach all viewers), plus an IR In minijack and Ethernet LAN. The latter

is provided not for content delivery but to provide access to the projector's control interface via a networked web browser. Custom installers will have no problem incorporating this model into CI projects, as it's compliant with AMX, Control 4 and Crestron systems; there are also memories for both 16:9 and Cinemascope aspect ratios – good news for those running a variable aspect-ratio screen.

The projector ships with a functional, backlit zapper that offers direct access to the various viewing presets and calibration modes. Remote access of focus, shift and the 2.1 zoom make the projector a relative snap to align. There's considerable vertical and horizontal latitude.

Should you want on-body controls, then physical input, menu, lens cover and navigation buttons are discreetly provided.

Powered up

The VPL-VW1000ES surprises by just how quietly it runs, at least when the lamp is on its most economic setting. At 22dB it's easily cloaked by even a modest audio system.

At 2,000 ANSI lumens the projector is bright, making it suitable for large-ish cinema spaces and those with screens up to 300in. It's also usable in a partially-lit room. Illumination comes via a 330W Ultra High Pressure lamp.

Sony's Iris3 technology, which adjusts the aperture opening depending on content, can be run in Full Auto and Auto Limited modes, or left to manual; I found the Auto

Limited mode worked well enough and didn't prove distracting. Dynamic contrast is rated at 1,000,000:1.

Delve into the menus and you'll discover a raft of user adjustments. However, a comprehensive selection of presets makes it possible to match pretty much any content source with a sympathetic setting. This projector does not make you work overly hard straight from the box.

Fabulous performer

There are multiple elements that contribute to the VPL-VW1000ES's overall visual performance, but the bottom line is that this is a fabulous performer. If you've got £17,000 burning a hole in your pocket, stop reading now and go slap down a deposit. You won't be disappointed.

Resolution, contrast and colour fidelity are all Michelin-starred. The VPL-VW1000ES offers multiple colour space choices, principally BT.709 (for HDTV), DCI (Digital Cinema specification) and Adobe RGB, while motion clarity is outstanding. The projector sports a simplified version of Sony's proprietary Motionflow system, offering just two options: Film Projection and Motion Enhancer. Blu-ray test footage presented as native 2K confirms the best part of 1,000 lines delivered at 6.5ppf (pixels per frame), regardless of whether Film Projection was Off and Motion Enhancer was set Low, or when Film Projection was On and Motion Enhancer High. Naturally, with the Enhancer Off, fine details become indistinct, although arguably



The adjustment bureau

Picture settings

As with the rest of Sony's VPL home cinema projector range, picture tweaks are made via an overlaying menu that majors on functionality in place of flair. It's here where you can call upon the Reality Creation 4K upscaling mode to breath fresh life into your BDs and DVDs



the key difference between all these settings is the motion artefacting they introduce. Low contributes minimal smudgy ripples around moving objects, whereas High has more overt artefacting. When viewing actual 4K footage Motion Enhancer is not used.

To view native 4K content, I partnered the VPL-VW1000 with a PC running a selection of test footage and trailers. Output was via an AMD Radeon HD7970, currently the only graphics card able to squirt 4096 x 2160 video at 24fps over HDMI.

My test material comprised time-lapse video shot on Canon 5D and 60D DSLRs and an animation, both in .rv format, and trailers for the *Total Recall* and *...Girl with a Dragon Tattoo* remakes.

It's stunning just how deep you can look into a 4K image. Unencumbered by a visible pixel grid, it's possible to peer at astonishingly small objects and see detail and nuance. The Quad HD animation sequence reveals gradations of skin

tone and wispy hair detail that seem almost hyper-real.

The two Hollywood trailers provide a slightly different viewing experience, as film stock and grain ultimately conspire to be a barrier to the kind of mega-detail found in the Canon footage. That said, what

'With the VPL-VW1000ES Sony has produced the most exciting home theatre projector in the world'

made it onscreen was literally all that was there to be seen in the clips.

Quad HD content, be it 4096 x 2160/24 or 3840 x 2160/24/25/30 is played as native. Of course, most of the time this PJ will be used with Full HD BDs and other high-res broadcast sources from the likes of Sky and Virgin Media. The key to upscaling all these is the VPL-VW1000ES's Reality Creation tool. When engaged, all incoming sources are upscaled to

4096 x 2160/24, and that includes standard-def DVDs.

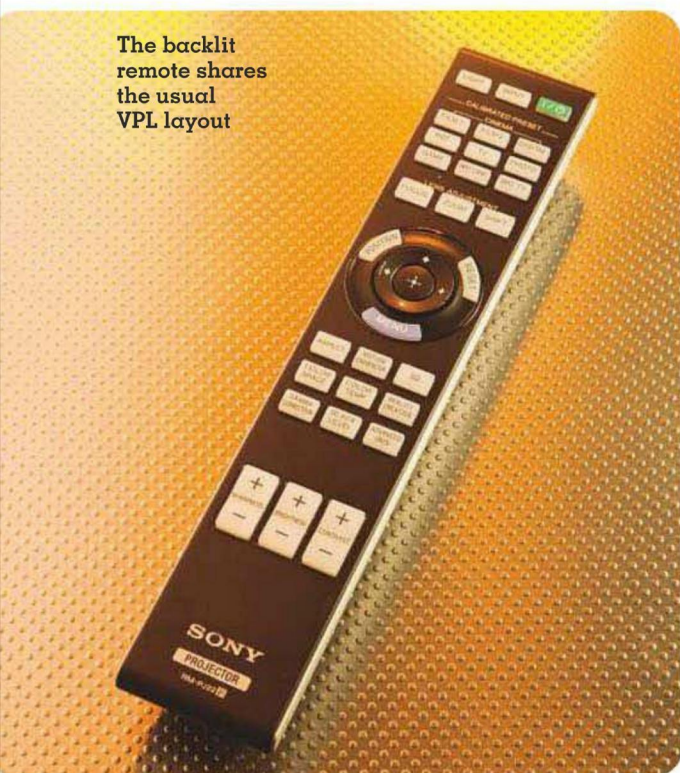
The good news is that upscaled HD content looks crisp and cinematic. While the projector is obviously not adding detail to what's encoded on a Blu-ray disc, the increased pixel density and the projector's post-processing smarts do bring benefits (perhaps it's better to think of it as 'enhanced' high-def rather than 'upscaled').

For example, the opening sequence of acclaimed action thriller *Drive* features a slow pan across a map of downtown Los Angeles. Played unaltered at 2K, with Motion Enhancer switched Off, detail and typography in this map lacks bite; with the Motion Enhancer on Low (but the content still played through at 2K), there is clear visual improvement. However, engage the Reality Creation 4K hyperdrive, and text really begins to pop. Ryan Gosling's eyes twinkle more, too.

The movie's opening tree logo for Oddlot Entertainment also provides



Side-mounted inputs include a pair of HDMI's



The backlit remote shares the usual VPL layout

graphic evidence of the effectiveness of the projector's picture processor. Viewed in extreme close up, the foliage on the tree at the centre of the logo can be seen to enjoy better delineation, with enhanced contrast and smoother gradation. When this refinement is applied across the entirety of the image you have a subtle but appreciable gain in perceived detail. And, of course, the picture appears silky smooth. Compared to Full HD SXRD, the pixels in these 4K SXRD panels have been reduced from 7µm to 4µm; Sony also claims greater smoothness and better light reflection.

Early samples of the VPL-VW1000ES were notable for image blur on fast motion from upscaled BDs. That issue now seems to have been put to bed. When Gosling puts pedal to metal, there's no unnatural smooching in the image.

The VPL-VW1000ES behaves a little differently when given the task of scaling DVD. Playing the HQV test disc native from a DVD player elicits an interesting quirk. Fed the standard jaggies test, the projector takes a surprisingly long time before deciding just how to best deinterlace the image. Once processed though, it does a remarkably clean job.

The other big revelation is the projector's 3D performance, which I hesitantly describe as excellent. While there was no 4K 3D content available for my test, a selection of

Blu-ray 3D favourites enjoyed a 4K makeover. The resulting images appear clever deep.

The VPL-VW1000ES maintains an acceptable level of brightness when viewed through 3D glasses and crosstalk is negligible to the point of irrelevance. Well-authored platters, such as *Avatar*, look spectacular, combining pronounced depth with nuanced colour and texture; hideously authored discs, such as *Monsters Vs Aliens*, are also unsettlingly clean. I also ran a selection of stereoscopic 720p documentary material, which again impressed with its clarity.

The VPL-VW1000ES is certain to provoke debate amongst cinephiles about the value of 4K in the home. After all, resolution is as much about viewing distance as fine detail, and some might sensibly argue you need a screen approaching 300in to really appreciate the benefits. For this audition, I was watching an image only just over a third of that. That said, I did give it some inspection from close quarters.

The content conundrum can't be ignored either. To drive this beast took a PC with a sub-atomic graphics card, and there's no reason to think that situation will change anytime soon. Delivering 4K video requires serious computational grunt and there's no HDMI interface standard for CE gear equal to the task. And there's no sign that Hollywood is looking to commercialise Quad HD movies for the home anytime soon.

But perhaps none of that matters. We could become the source of tomorrow's 4K content ourselves thanks to advances in camcorder technology. There are also tangible benefits for photographers. The PlayStation3 is awaiting a firmware update that will give it the ability to output 4K still images.

Conclusion

With the VPL-VW1000ES, Sony has put an ultra-high resolution cat amongst the SD pigeons perched at the higher-end of the projector market. Well engineered, with cutting-edge optics and electronics, it's a statement piece that rewrites the projection rule book. Sure there's a content deficit, but would you seriously buy another product at this rarefied level that wasn't 4K future-proofed?

With the VPL-VW1000ES Sony has produced quite simply the most exciting home theatre projector in the world.

→ Specifications

3D: YES Active Shutter

Full HD: YES and beyond – 4,096 x 2,160 resolution

Component video: YES one set of inputs

HDMI: YES 2 v1.4

PC input: YES D-Sub

12V trigger: YES two

Brightness (claimed): 2,000 ANSI Lumens

Contrast ratio (claimed): 100,000:1 (dynamic)

Dimensions: 520(w) x 208(h) x 640(d)mm

Weight: 20kg

Features: 4K SXRD panels; 3D compatible (frame sequential/side by side/ top and bottom); backlit remote control; Motionflow; Reality Creation 4K upscaling; ARC-F (All-Range Crisp Focus) lens; remote focus, shift and zoom; Iris3 technology



HCC VERDICT

Sony VPL-VW1000ES → £16,800

→ Supplier: www.sony.co.uk/biz

→ Tel: 01256 683871

Highs: Astounding resolution; 4K upscaling for Blu-ray and other sources; stylish design; low operating noise; high quality optics

Lows: No source of commercial 4K video content; expensive when viewed primarily as a 2K projector

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Dream theatres



When it comes to high-end home theatres, the CEDIA Awards celebrate the best of the best.

Mark Craven settles into the front row...

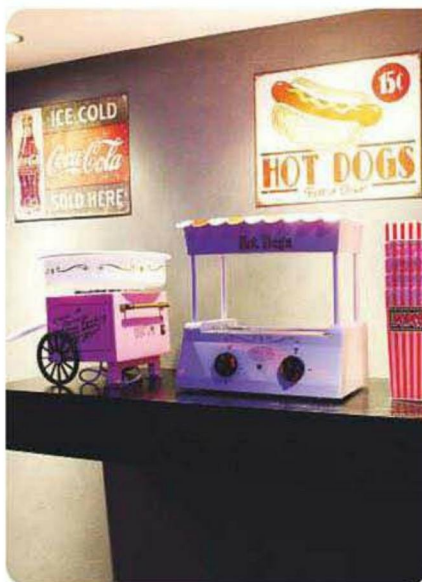
Each year, the CEDIA Awards showcase the staggering work being done by the custom install industry in the UK, Europe and beyond. So if you're looking for inspiration for your own project, or are hunting for a pro firm to work its magic in your house, then you've come to the right place.

The entries are divided into categories depending on their price range and type, before

being meticulously documented and judged by a panel including HCC's very own CI fanatic Steve May. The awards extend way beyond the world of mere home cinema into the heady realms of multimedia whole-house makeovers, although here we've mainly focused on our favourite categories – media rooms, dedicated home theatres and the always impressive 'innovative solution' showdown. Enjoy.



A taste of old-school Hollywood in the home



Best Home Cinema: Under £40,000

Winner: Cinema Architects

This South African cinema room is was described the CEDIA judges as 'old-school Hollywood fun,' and it's easy to see what they mean. From the retro artwork to the comfy-looking red seating, this is a space we could imagine spending a lot of time in.

Hardware in the 7.1-channel, Full HD system includes Harman Kardon amplification, Paradigm in-wall speakers and a Panasonic projector. Integrated control of the electronics and gorgeous lighting (which incorporates LED strips and fibre optics) comes via an Apple iPad. The owner is naturally over the moon with project: 'The sound is amazing and the picture quality is truly satisfying.'

www.cinema-architects.co.za



Highly Commended: FAB Audio Visual

FAB AV scooped a Highly Commended nod from the CEDIA judges for this dedicated room converted from a pool house. It's sleek design and innovative lighting creates an 'awesome movie-watching experience.'

www.fabav.co.uk



Finalist: Sensory International

This bijou cinema room began life as a garage, with the installers using every inch of available space to create a high-tech movie den. Kit includes Artcoustic speakers and a custom-built Mac Mini.

www.sensoryinternational.com



Finalist: The Big Picture

The owner wanted a home cinema space that could double as a family room – customised cabinets, a drop-down projector screen and decor-matching speaker grilles do the job perfectly.

www.getthebigpicture.co.uk



Best Home Cinema: £40,000 - £100,000

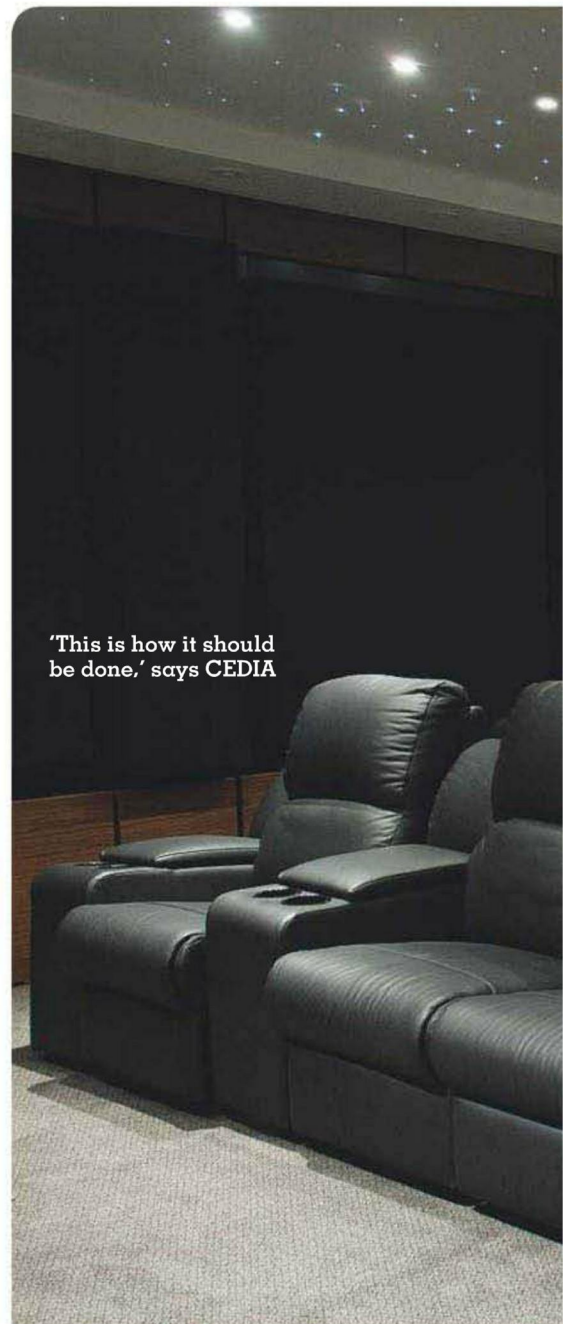
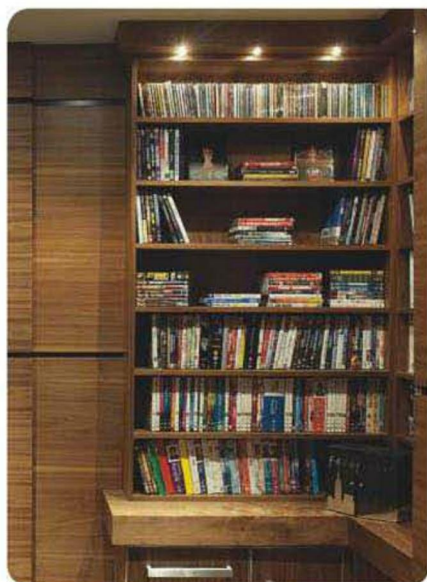
Winner: HFX Systems

This largescale home cinema features no fewer than 15 seats, spread over three tiers, and a kit list that screams high-end sophistication.

We suspect a fair whack of the not-inconsiderable overall cost will have been spent on the fearless JBL Synthesis audio system, which includes 18in subwoofers and dedicated 800W mono power amps – and the Projection Design Aviello 2.35:1 projector. Sound processing and BD playback is tackled by Marantz separates.

The CEDIA judging panel didn't hesitate in awarding this room the winner's badge, saying: 'It's fab. It looks like THE best home cinema.' And we expect the lucky owner agrees with them.

www.hfxsystems.com



Racking 'ell

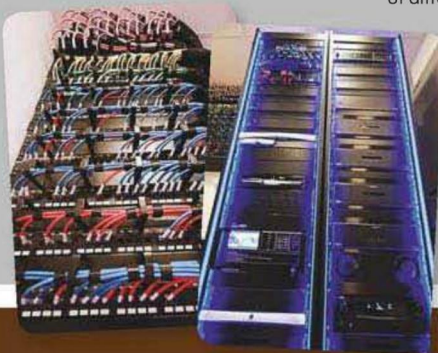
Applauding the kings of cable management

A personal favourite of Team HCC is CEDIA's Best Dressed Rack award. Here, the judging panels is on the hunt for 'excellence in design and installation, as well as best practice, in cabling on and to the rack' – cue pictures of some headache-inducing runs of cabling and AV racks that look like something out of Cyberdyne Systems.

Pimp My Rack

This year's winner was London-based It's Done! Technology

(www.itstdone-technology.com), with a twin-rack system showing ridiculous attention to detail – even the bend radius of different types cable is taken into account. And the icing on the cake is definitely the cool blue LED strips, fitted to the outer frames and bases of the rack, which are activated by a sensor when someone enters the boot room. How smart is that?



Finalist: Dawsons Group

This lavish loft conversion, which mixes Meridian speakers, JVC projector and Crestron control, was completed by the installer in just 10 days – including the decoration. Nice work.

www.dawsonsgroup.com



Highly Commended: Finite Solutions

Another room getting a Highly Commended citation, this incorporates a SIM2 Lumis 3D projector and an external lobby area where the owner can browse his Blu-ray and DVD collection.
www.finitesolutions.co.uk



Finalist: Intuitive Homes

Fitting an AV system in a period listed building means modifying walls is a no-no, so the Manchester firm had to overcome numerous challenges with this Crestron-controlled bigscreen cinema.
www.intuitivehomes.co.uk



Prestige Audio

Another swimming pool-to-cinema conversion, this room sports a brilliant mix of furnishings, lighting, decor and cutting-edge electronics. We'd swap 30 lengths for this in an instant.
www.prestigeaudio.co.uk



Best Home Cinema: Over £100,000

Winner: Smartcomm

The owner of this category winner demanded a state-of-the-art eight-seater cinema with a modern, minimalist feel – and Buckinghamshire installer Smartcomm has delivered. Audio is delivered in a 9.2 array by Triad speakers, while a Digital Projection M-Vision projector (cunningly housed in a mirror kit system) fires HD movies at a 2.40:1 Screen Research curved screen – lateral masking accommodates different aspect ratios. Alex Dixon Interiors were brought on board to help blend the AV electronics with the sumptuous decor – and a 'star-ceiling' is the perfect finishing touch

www.smartcomm.co.uk



Finalist: Finite Solutions

A second entry for London-based Finite Solutions, this attic-based dedicated cinema room packs two seating rows, a bar area with stools and 3D projection into a challenging space.

www.finitesolutions.co.uk

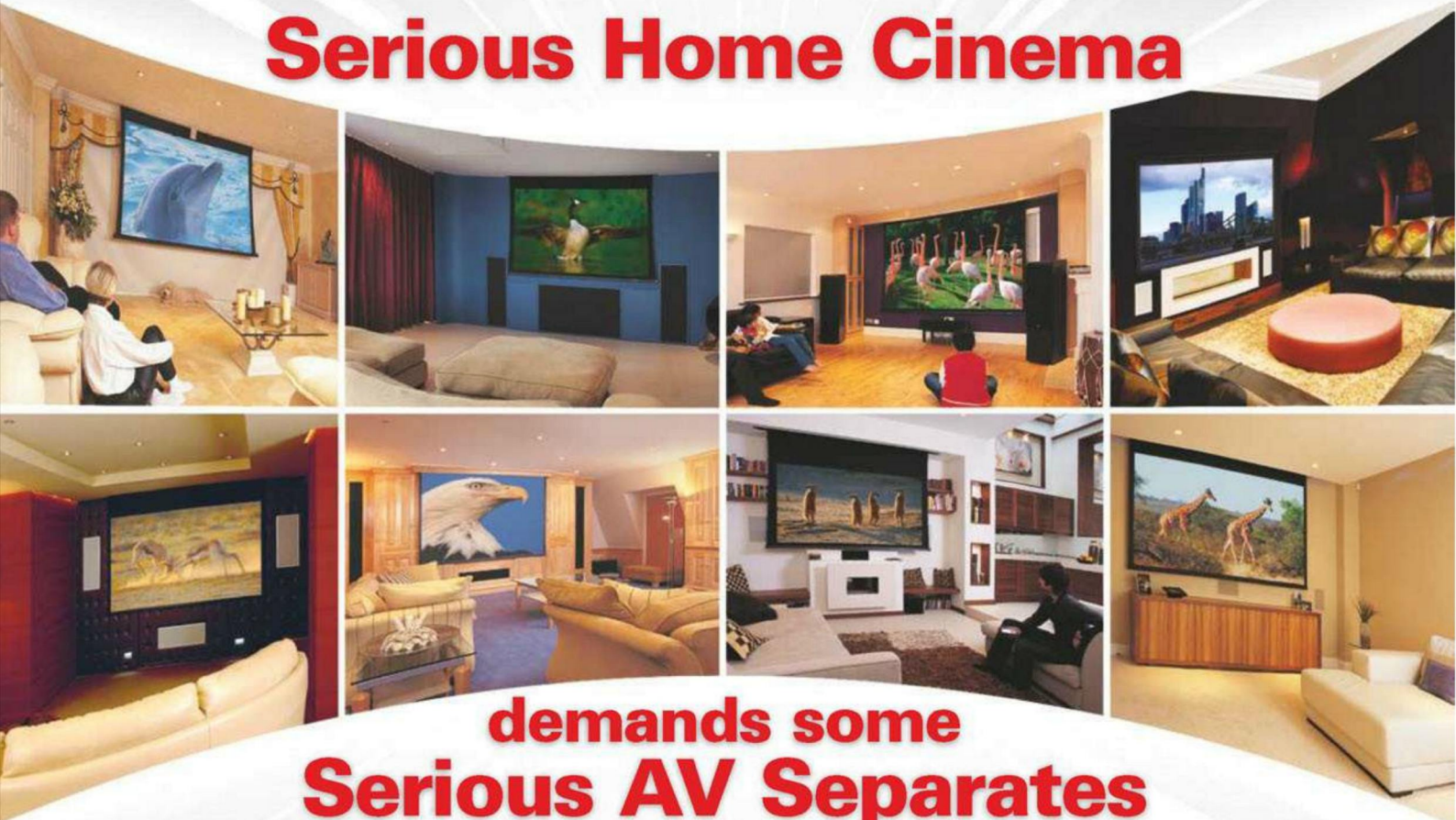
Finalist: Nirvana Distribution

An astonishing project by Egyptian installer Nirvana Distribution, incorporating Focal Grand Utopia speakers and a monster screen.

www.nirvanadistribution.com



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www.bowers-wilkins.com



Best Integrated Home: £30,000 - £100,000

Winner: Grahams Hi-Fi

What started life as the installation of a projector-based cinema system in a basement pool area (pictured) quickly developed into a whole-house makeover once the owner saw exactly what could be achieved.

North London installer Grahams Hi-Fi specified a Control 4 system for smart control of the AV, access, security and HVAC (heating, ventilation and air-conditioning) systems, and integrated it with Lutron Homeworks lighting control. Remote monitoring and access is also included, with email and SMS alerts automatically notifying the owner and maintenance contractor of any potential issues.
www.grahams.co.uk

Best Integrated Home: Over £250,000

Winner: T&T Automation

The snug media room pictured right is just part of a high-spec smart home overseen by Essex-based installer T&T Automation – and one that was deemed a 'top-end integration project' and a 'clear winner' by the CEDIA judges. Each room in the house with a TV display (and that includes the bathrooms, obviously) can call upon a variety of video servers, satellite TV, Blu-ray, Apple TV and even CCTV footage. Touchpanel controls throughout the property provide access to the DMX lighting network, security/access system and more. The media room itself includes both a 3DTV and projector and a sofa fitted with a custom D-Box solution.
www.tandt-eu.com



Best Innovative Solution

Winner: Grahams Hi-Fi

Behind the multicoloured triptych in this media room lurks the AV rack. Access to the area is enabled through a proximity sensor located behind one of the trio of pictures. A swipe of the hand and the door swings open – but only once the left-hand picture has slid forward by 100mm to provide the necessary space. Now that's clever.

www.grahams.co.uk



Drop zone: The room also houses a projector and screen

Custom-made 'boxes' disguise the room's speakers



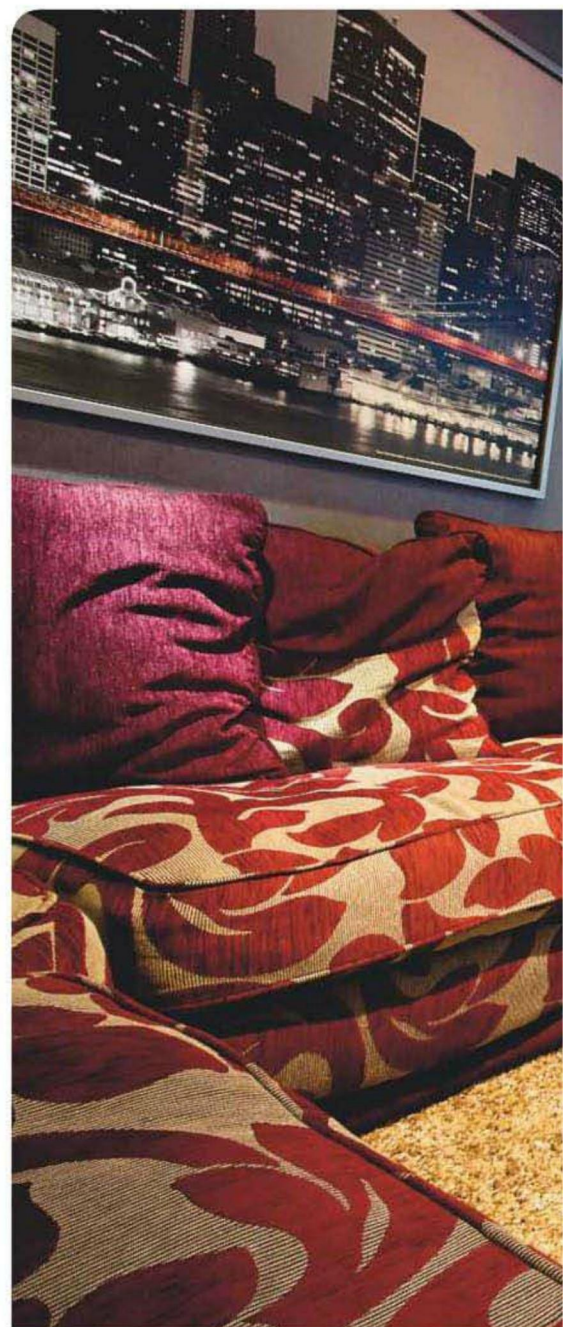
Best Media Room Under £15,000

Winner: Olive Audio Visual

London firm Olive Audio Visual emerged a category winner thanks to this modern-looking basement media room in an 18th century home.

Praised by the judges for being 'integrated and elegant with a beautiful layout,' it features a series of rear-lit, wall-mounted boxes, custom-built to house the Velodyne subwoofer and Bowers & Wilkins speakers. Meanwhile, the drop-down projection screen is positioned so it descends in front of roof-lights (which are vital in this subterranean space). Other hardware includes a 50in S-series Panasonic plasma, JVC DLA-X3 projector and intelligent control courtesy of an RTI handset and processor.

www.olive-av.co.uk



Finalist: Bespoke Home Cinemas

The owner of this room – dubbed 'The Wife is Right' – demanded invisibility, resulting in an in-ceiling 5.1 speaker array, drop-down projector and screen, and hidden cabling.

www.bespokehomecinemas.com



Finalist: Olive Audio Visual

Olive AV (again) turned this awkward-shaped basement into a projector-based family room by changing its 'orientation' by 90 degrees. Purpose-built cabinets stop the kids fiddling with the AV equipment.

www.olive-av.co.uk



Finalist: Ashway Smart Homes
A compact space transformed into an impressive cinema, with a false ceiling housing the projector and speakers. Sources, including the PS3, are controlled via a Control4 system. Looks like paradise for bigscreen gaming fans.
www.ashwaysmarthomes.co.uk

Marine Marvel

Dawsons Group takes high-end AV to the high-seas in this super-yacht system

As you might expect, marine installations are quite a big thing in the custom install industry – after all, if you can afford a monster-sized Sunseeker, you’ve probably got a few quid available for integrated AV.

This year, Bournemouth-based Dawsons Group walked away with the award for Best Marine Installation, thanks to a ‘technically flawless’ installation that blends in superbly with the yacht’s immaculate interior

design. No less than nine Apple iPads are onboard for control of the yacht’s AV, lighting, blinds and even engine systems. The master ‘stateroom’ enjoys a 50in Bang & Olufsen plasma, discreetly housed in a Future Automation lift, while every cabin features its own integrated iPod dock and Kaleidescape Blu-ray player. And when the owner is on the flybridge, he can still access HD movies with surround sound on a pair of outdoor monitors.





A room as much about music as video

Best Media Room Over £15,000

Winner: Smart Business SL

Whether the owner of this basement media room is in the mood for movies, gaming, music-making or karaoke, it's all catered for.

Lauded by the CEDIA judges for being a 'truly multi-purpose room,' this Spanish conversion features two audio systems (a 5.1 setup and B&W cabinets for guitar/karaoke hookup), a 50in display and a projector, Sony PS3 and Nintendo Wii consoles, plus disco lights and mirrorballs for when the mood strikes. Control is handled via an AMX touchpanel, and sound-proofing ensures that people elsewhere in the house don't get disturbed by the below-stairs antics.

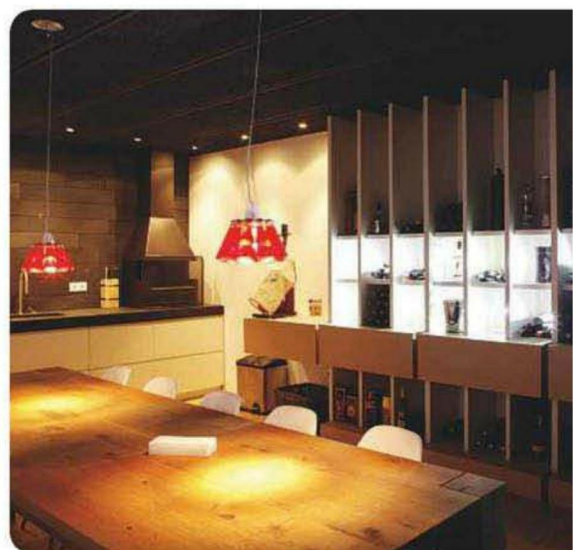
www.smartbusiness.es



Finalist: Imagine This

Previously featured in *HCC*, this dual-function room packs both a stage area and a serious-sized projector screen. Acoustic treatments are carefully hidden behind the fabric-lined walls.

www.imaginetthis.uk.com



Finalist: Grahams Hi-Fi

This setup uses both a 65in plasma and 2.35:1 projection screen. The AV cabinets were custom-made to match the red-leather 'runway' on the floor. Lights, blinds and curtains are all intelligently-controlled.

www.grahams.co.uk



Best Integrated Home, £100,000 - £250,000

Finalist: De Opera Domotica

Maybe it's the integrated bar area that got our attention, but this cinema room (which is part of a larger whole-house conversion) is one of our personal favourites, with a retro-feel courtesy of the plush red screen curtains and mood lighting.

The rest of the property, with its Crestron-controlled AV, HVAC, security and lighting, is equally impressive – there's even a pool/jacuzzi room.

www.deoperadomotica.nl



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Revealed

THE 10 BEST

3D BLU-RAYS

Team HCC dons its silly spex to find the essential discs for your 3D collection

The 3D Blu-ray market is exploding. Where once stereoscopic HD titles were as rare as a decent movie starring Michael Madsen, you can now fill your 3D disc-shelf with everything from music concerts and documentaries to kids' toons, sci-fi extravaganzas and blood-soaked slasher flicks.

Yet our inner geeks don't always demand the best films when it comes to 3D. If you're going to don the goggles, you want to make sure the Blu-ray you've selected will have some impressive 3D imaging to savour. Especially if you're trying to show off your new 3D display to your friends/family/neighbours/cat.

Yet again, no one wants to sit through an awful movie just to see a couple of axes loom out of the screen and slice through the air. The following ten 3D discs have therefore been chosen because they offer a blend of impressive stereoscopy and solid storytelling – well, most of them.

If you're building a 3D library, we recommend you check these out.



10. Drive Angry

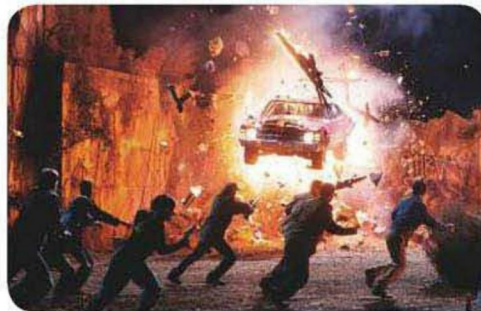
Region B BD, Lionsgate



Regardless of what James Cameron says, 3D and exploitation cinema were clearly made for one another. No filmmaker proves that point better than Patrick Lussier, who cut his teeth on the surprisingly effective stereoscopic slasher *My Bloody Valentine* in 2009. Two years later he followed this with the even more insane *Drive Angry*, starring Nic Cage as a gun-toting, car-driving, escapee from Hell out to save his granddaughter from a cult of Satanists.

Lionsgate's 3D Blu-ray makes the most of this ludicrous set-up and the violence that quickly ensues. Barely a scene goes by without a bullet, an axe or some piece of human viscera being thrust out of the screen and into your face – meaning that there's far more depth to the image than the story or the characters who inhabit it.

Demo 3Delight: Nic Cage's Milton quite literally crashes the Satanic cult's sacrificial ceremony in *Drive Angry*'s explosive finale



Pole position: Car stunts and devil worship ensure plenty of 3D thrills in *Drive Angry*

9. Hugo

Region B BD, Entertainment in Video



While we were originally a little concerned to learn that Martin Scorsese's first 3D flick would be a kids' film, we should have known better. What the *Goodfellas* director delivered was an appealing homage to the pioneers of early cinema that elevates stereoscopic filmmaking into an art form.

The Blu-ray release revels in Scorsese's sumptuous 3D visuals, lending a real sense of scale and volume to the period locations. And, while Eiv's UK release does feature a minor quirk in the form of a shifting window-boxing effect that isn't present on the US Blu-ray, we reckon you'll soon forget all about it as you're sucked into the delightful narrative and 3D image.

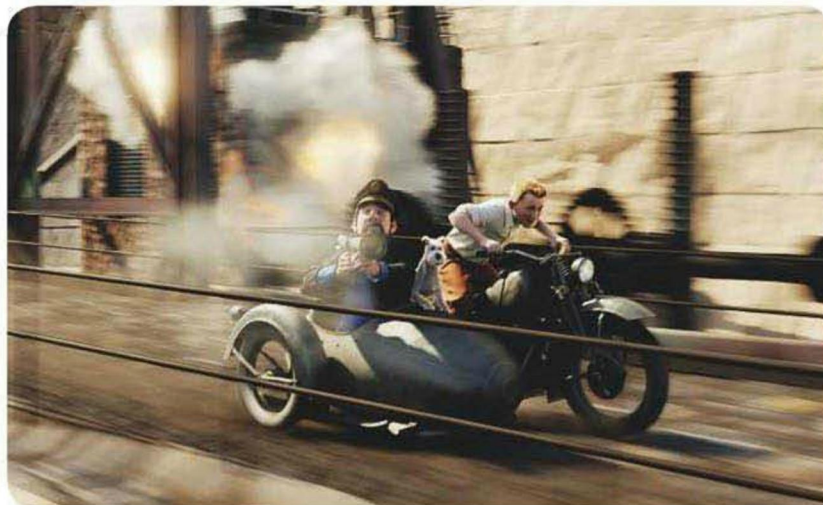
Demo 3Delight: The movie's opening sequence uses the additional stereoscopic depth to put you right into the world Hugo lives in

8. The Adventures of Tintin: The Secret of the Unicorn

All-region BD, Paramount



Take one legendary Belgian series of comic books. Add two of Hollywood's most powerful filmmakers in the form of Steven Spielberg and Peter Jackson. Finally, stir in the technical expertise of the world's foremost motion-capture studio and what have you got? One of the most action-packed computer-



animated films ever produced – and the nearest you'll get to a stereoscopic Indiana Jones adventure for the time being.

Spielberg's animated adventure drips with the kind of thrills and excitement that was so sorely lacking from *...Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, and Paramount's excellent Blu-ray presentation means that Tintin's Tinseltown debut is also one of the best-looking 3D flicks available right now. Roll on the inevitable sequel!

Demo 3Delight: The motorbike chase through the streets of a Moroccan port illustrates Spielberg's mastery of 3D action

Morocc'n roll: Tintin's chase through a Saharan town is a stereoscopic show-stopper

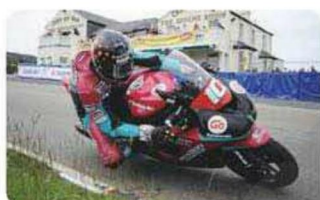
7. Final Destination 5

All-region BD, Warner Home Video



For some people, 3D has never escaped the stigma of its association with the gimmick-driven sci-fi flicks of the 1960s and the horror sequels of the 1980s. For others (ourselves included) this is no bad thing, so we applauded when a franchise like *Final Destination* got in on the act. Okay, it didn't get off to the best start with 2009's dreadful *The Final Destination*, but the

'Barely a scene goes by without a bullet, axe or piece of human viscera being thrust in your face'





series hit its stereoscopic stride with last year's fifth instalment.

Boasting some of the most imaginative kills in the franchise yet, *Final Destination 5*'s Blu-ray encode takes great pleasure in rubbing your face in every bit of onscreen blood and guts, and the creative use of the three-dimensional visual space makes it feel more like a gory movie version of the board game *Mousetrap* than ever before.

Demo 3Delight: Fancy being speared in the face by a yacht's mast or having hot tar poured in your lap? These are just two of the treats waiting for you during the premonition of a bridge collapsing

6. The Hole

Region B Blu-ray, EntertainmentOne



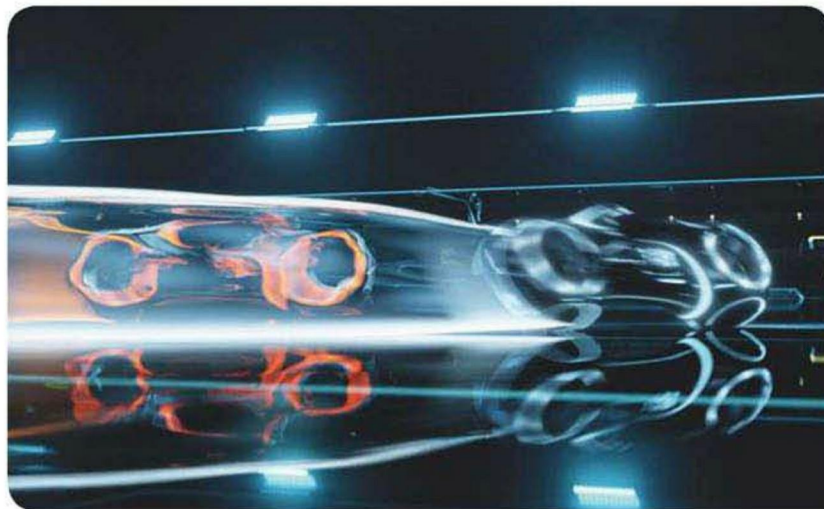
Joe Dante's *Poltergeist*-esque supernatural family thriller was unjustly overlooked on its cinema release, but at least this belated Blu-ray release means that anyone who missed it on the bigscreen can

discover for themselves why *The Hole* managed to beat the likes of *My Bloody Valentine*, *Coraline* and *Up* to scoop the inaugural 3D Award at the 2009 Venice Film Festival.

While you might expect that most of the focus of the 3D effect to be on the titular hole, Dante employs the technique to enhance the overall scale of what could otherwise be a series of rather insular and claustrophobic locations. That's not to say that the *Gremlins* veteran isn't averse to having fun with the format – as shown by a baseball gag that harks back to the legendary 1953 3D shocker *House of Wax*.

Demo 3Delight: Any of the shots looking up out of the hole are supremely effective, but our favourite is the moment when the trio of kids dangle a camcorder into it (and out of the screen).

'The Hole beat the likes of Coraline and Up to scoop the inaugural 3D Award at the Venice Film Festival'



Get your motor running: 3D Light Cycles are just one of the pleasures to be found in *Tron: Legacy*

5. TT3D: Closer to the Edge

Region B Blu-ray, EntertainmentOne



If you fancy a break from 3D robots and stereoscopic splatter you could do a lot worse than this fascinating documentary. An investigation into the appeal of the Isle of Man TT Race, and the psychology of those who compete in the frequently lethal sporting event, *TT3D* (as its name suggests) is also a nifty showcase for what 3D can add to any kind of movie when the technology is used in an inventive yet unobtrusive manner.

The film's native 3D visuals are incredible, particularly the race material captured by track-side cameras. In addition, director Richard De Aragues employs the tech for creative compositions during interviews with the racers, making great use of the additional layers of depth and picture information.

Demo 3Delight: The perilously twisting nature of the road circuit is made all the more clear in three dimensions

4. Tron: Legacy

All-region BD, Walt Disney



Science-fiction is the home of epic spectacle – and films don't come much more epic or spectacular than this long-awaited sequel to the '80s cult favourite *Tron*.

Tron: Legacy takes all of the best elements from the first film (Disc Wars! Light Cycles!) and embellishes them with today's technological flair. And, given the film's deliberate CG-style visuals, it's no surprise that it turns out to be a perfect fit for 3D. However, *Tron: Legacy* goes one better still, with certain sequences shot on the IMAX format for an even greater sense of

What? No Avatar?

Oh, go on then...

James Cameron's blockbusting sci-fi adventure has become the poster boy of 3D – and quite rightly, too, as Cameron's devotion to the technology ensures it's a masterpiece of stereoscopy. Demo sequences abound. From the opening beats with Sully (Sam Worthington) waking up in the cavernous Cryo-Vault, to the airborne beast-riding showcase, there's always something to admire – and the Blu-ray's HD visuals and surround mix are first-rate, too.

But, as you still can't actually buy *Avatar* on 3D Blu-ray, we've left it off our list...





spectacle. Thankfully, Disney's Blu-ray release is more than up to the task of recreating it all, and features an equally immersive 7.1 mix.

Demo 3Delight: Sam's foray into the gladiatorial world of the Disc Wars is full of flying discs and impressive volumetric effects

3. Transformers: Dark of the Moon

All-region BD, Paramount



If there's one thing that the format's fans and detractors alike can agree on, it's that filming this third *Transformers* movie in 3D forced director Michael Bay to curb his usual hyperactive shooting style.

Say 'goodbye' to the rapid editing that leaves no shot lasting more than a second, and 'hello' to lengthier takes that finally allow you to study the CG robots in the detail we've been demanding.

That said, there's absolutely no let-up in the scale of the onscreen action. This time we get a full-on invasion of Earth (well, Chicago), delivered on BD with a superb 3D encode that emphasise the size of the robots, as well as highlighting every little dent in their armour.

Demo 3Delight: The shot of NEST troops in jump suits flying into the Windy City, while a burning helicopter plummets out of the sky. Awesome

2. Tangled

All-region BD, Walt Disney



Understandably, computer-animated films have been one of the driving forces of 3D Blu-ray – but you'll be hard-pressed to find a more visually exciting example than Disney's *Tangled*.

While the film's stereoscopic visuals don't ever try to stab you in the eye, there's an remarkable sense of depth to the imagery – helped by the fact that while backgrounds are blurred in the 2D Blu-ray encode, they're left sharp and clear in the 3D MVC version. There's also no trace of the drop off in fine detailing and colour reproduction that some frequently cite as a key problem with 3D. In other words, it's everything that Full HD 3D should be: unobtrusive, natural, detailed and, most of all, utterly immersive.

Demo 3Delight: The Chinese lantern sequence isn't just a work of art, it's the best demo scene around for checking your 3D kit for crosstalk

1. Resident Evil: Afterlife

All-region BD, Sony Pictures



We're yet to tire of Paul W.S. Anderson's guns, gals and zombies franchise, especially when it delivers home cinema thrills as effectively as this. Milla Jovovich returns again as Alice, the feisty undead-battler with a penchant for slo-mo, in a gloriously batty, fast-paced actioner. A DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix offers all-round mayhem in place of subtlety, and Anderson provides an informative commentary as part of the extras.

Visually, this BD platter is a knockout. Anderson may not get as much love as Cameron and Scorsese when it comes to 3D, but he's comfortable working with it – employing its poke-you-in-the-face prowess wherever possible and using the extra depth to craft the dystopian future locations. Our favourite 3D platter yet.

Demo 3Delight: The slow-motion water-soaked scrap with the Executioner – a sequence you'll want to watch again and again

Avoid!

Sometimes, 3D just doesn't help matters

Thor



An awesome comic book caper given a bland 3D conversion – stick to the 2D disc!

Clash of the Titans

The first ret-conned 3D movie was slated when it reached cinemas – and for good reason

The Last Airbender

Really, M Night Shyamalan's fantasy movie isn't even worth watching in 2D...

Peter Gabriel: New Blood – Live in London 3D



A curious concert (Gabriel accompanied by an orchestra) that you won't want to don 3D spex to watch

Gulliver's Travels

Jonathan Swift will be turning in his grave – both the film and its 3D conversion are unpleasant



The axeman cometh:

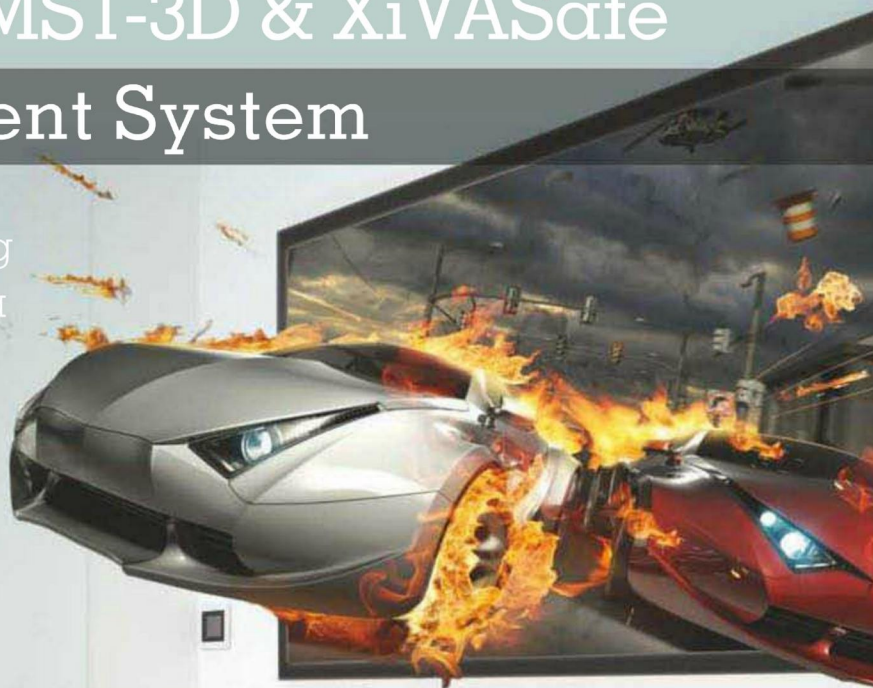
This hulking beast takes pride of place in *Resident Evil: Afterlife's* standout demo sequence



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DIGITAL COPY

With dedicated cinema rooms on his mind, **Mark Craven** wonders whether it's worth saving up the money to go down the pro-installer route

If you had an empty space in your house – perhaps a basement or a loft, or even an unused garage – and you wanted to convert it into a home cinema, what route would you take? Would you break out the toolbox, roll up your shirt-sleeves and do it yourself, or call in a professional installer?

I suspect many people would opt for the first option. The 'D.I.Y.' installs often featured in this magazine are proof, after all, that even quite largescale projects can be tackled without too many complications and deliver impressive results. And doing it this way should work out lighter on the money, too.

In fact, from correspondence we've received over the years, it would appear that some people would never dream of going near a custom installer. Their attitude is 'why pay someone else to do a job you can do easily yourself?'

The answer, and please don't be offended, is that you probably can't do it as well – something I think this year's CEDIA awards (featured on page 24) clearly show.

The whole kit and caboodle

The problem that the custom install industry has is that any cinema room's kit-list looks awfully familiar. With the exception of systems that use Kaleidescape (or other brands') servers and players to spit out video, the main source is typically a Blu-ray deck – and you can get a very good one of these for just a few hundred quid (one of the £250,000 smart homes in our CEDIA feature uses a £250 Panasonic player). There's often a Sky+HD unit somewhere in the rack. Maybe a games console, too. Hardly exotic kit that only an industry professional can get his hands on. Combine these with an AV receiver, 5.1 or 7.1 array of speakers, a Full HD projector and a dedicated projector screen and you've got yourself a home cinema.

Well, sort of.

Where the humble custom installer earns his or her fee is not with the selecting and wiring in of the hardware (I'm choosing to ignore the multiroom conversions with miles of CAT5 cable, which are definitely not jobs I'd like to tackle myself). Moreover, it's the integration and calibration of that hardware, the acoustic treatment of the room, and the professional finish that you're paying for.

The CEDIA award winners are a case in point. The CEDIA judging panel doesn't just hand out a gong to whichever room has the most stylish carpet. Meticulous documentation outlines how the installer has worked with the room's dimensions, the positions of the speakers, furniture, walls and ceiling, and sonic frequencies, to arrive at the best possible surround sound performance – usually after a heavy bout of acoustic treatment. This service alone has to be worth shelling out for. **If you've ever heard a 5.1 or 7.1 system firing in a properly treated room you'll know what I mean.** Sure, your AVR does its own auto EQ thang, but it's not quite the same.

And then there's the fact that you don't have to lift a finger while they get on with it. Leave Mr Installer in your basement knocking up stud walls and calibrating your hi-def projector, and you can actually be at work, earning money to pay for all the Blu-rays you going to watch.

Now, unless I turn out to be a direct descendant of John D. Rockefeller, I doubt I'll ever get around to commissioning a professionally-built and calibrated cinema room. I'll just wait for my wife to nip out to Sainsbury's, take some inspiration from your own D.I.Y. projects, and start ripping up the attic floorboards. But if I could do it the other way, I most certainly would ●

Have you made use of a professional installer? Let us know via letters@homecinemachoice.com

Mark Craven will begin work on his own D.I.Y. home cinema as soon as he can remember exactly where he put his tool box and roll of speaker wire





FILM FANATIC

The Beek rediscovers his love of movie trailers thanks to the marketing of Ridley Scott's new sci-fi epic *Prometheus*

There's a genuine art to creating a film trailer, and it's one that goes beyond the standard template of rapid clips of explosive action cut to a frenetic aural backdrop provided by the likes of Linkin Park or Lost Prophets.

A truly great trailer should tease and intrigue an audience without giving everything away. It should function sort of like the first couple of seasons of *Lost* – arousing your interest and only answering your questions with yet more mysteries (which only the film itself can unravel...). And it needs to do all of this in around three minutes.

All of which is why I'm a complete trailer junkie. Unlike quite a few other people I know, on those rare occasions when I do venture out to my local multiplex, I don't view everything up to the start of the movie itself as time that can be spent faffing around in the foyer, chatting to friends and queueing for giant-sized tubs of popcorn.

As far as I'm concerned **the trailers that precede a film are a key part of the whole cinema-going experience**. And it doesn't matter that I've probably seen them all previously, online, over the past couple of months. What matters is viewing them on the big screen and feeling that crackle of excitement and anticipation running through the entire audience.

Imagination required

Unfortunately, the past few years have not exactly been a vintage period for film trailers. And this is particularly true where blockbusters are concerned, with the majority being reduced to regurgitating the unimaginative template that I outgrew earlier.

However, it finally looks like things could be changing with the arrival of the marketing for Ridley Scott's new sci-fi epic *Prometheus*. Here we have a film that has been shrouded in a level

of secrecy and misinformation rarely associated with a major Hollywood blockbuster. Heck, for the longest time nobody connected to the movie was even willing to confirm that the film was a prequel to Scott's 1979 classic *Alien*. It's a shame that all involved seemed to have forgotten about the 'Letter from Ridley Scott' that the director wrote in 2010 for the *Alien Anthology* boxset. He concluded this intro to the series by stating: 'I hope you enjoy what I have in store for you as we return to this dark, mysterious universe filled with Aliens, Space Jockeys and... something even more dangerous that you haven't seen yet. Consider this the ultimate primer for what's to come.'

All of the secrecy paid off a couple of months ago with the arrival of the first full *Prometheus* trailer. A virtuoso piece of promotion, it managed to answer all the questions surrounding the film's links to *Alien* without ruining any of the plot's twists and turns. The studio, Twentieth Century Fox, even made the online debut of the trailer an event itself, with three days of teasers leading up to its release. Then, at the end of April, came the premiere of an alternate trailer taking up an entire ad break in *Homeland* on Channel 4, with part of the next ad break devoted to tweets in response to the trailer! Even the online viral marketing – such as the advert for the David the Weyland Yutani robot and the Peter Weyland TED 2023 keynote speech – have proven just as effective at grabbing my interest without revealing too much about the movie.

The only thing left to find out is if *Prometheus* can possibly live up to its incredible marketing. And if it doesn't, at least the film has reminded me how good trailers can be when everyone involved actually puts some thought into it.

Are you a fan of film trailers, or do you prefer to see a film 'cold'?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

Anton van Beek spends so much time watching Blu-rays that he's started fossilising into his couch, like a home cinema version of *Alien's* Space Jockey





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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Want to comment on current technology? Need to share? **HCC** is here to help

Smart? No thanks!

While reading *HCC* 207, I couldn't help but agree with Mark Craven on the fact that every piece of new equipment has the 'Smart' functionality stamped across it as a prime selling point.

The internet on your television is not a new idea. I previously had a seven-metre S-video cable running from my PC to my TV. Okay, the picture was crap but the idea was there! I now have a PC that outputs 1,920 x 1,080 with audio over HDMI.

I recently bought a new AV receiver and at the store I was advised to get something with a music streamer and upscaling. Why? My games console has a music store and all



Yamaha's RX-V671: Plenty of features but still affordable

my other hardware outputs in HD anyway.

This all basically boils down to individual requirements but I disagree on giving some kit a lower review score because it doesn't have upscaling or Spotify, for instance.

At the end of the day a PC is used for accessing the internet, an AV receiver is for sound and the TV is to show that all-important image... Hang on, though, doesn't my phone do all of that?

Richard, via email

Thanks Richard. You've hit the nail right on the head, and in about a quarter of the words than it took Mark Craven.

While we're sure that many people would argue with you about restricting internet access to a PC (after all, many

Star
Letter



Making projectors simpler to setup

When are manufacturers finally going to add auto-calibration to projectors? Years ago, acoustic issues were fixed by experts using sophisticated software. But now even budget receivers can create an EQ filter for each speaker just by placing a microphone in the listening area and letting MCACC, Audyssey or YPAO do the work. Sure, you can buy video auto-calibration with high-end components but isn't that the same situation we saw in room acoustics ten years ago? Another option is to buy the software/meter and spend a few weekends learning to do it yourself (...just keep telling yourself it's a hobby). Or, you can do it by hiring an ISF calibrator – but that doesn't make economic sense for

projectors costing less than £2,000. Especially if you need to re-calibrate when the lamp ages, if you change rooms, or if you wish to also calibrate other TVs.

While some people might enjoy pixel peeping and listening to bat song (sorry Mr Stevenson), I'd be grateful if you could ask manufacturers to spend their R&D budgets on simplifying the calibration process and delivering improved picture quality for the living room rather than the laboratory.

Jon Mitchell, Twickenham

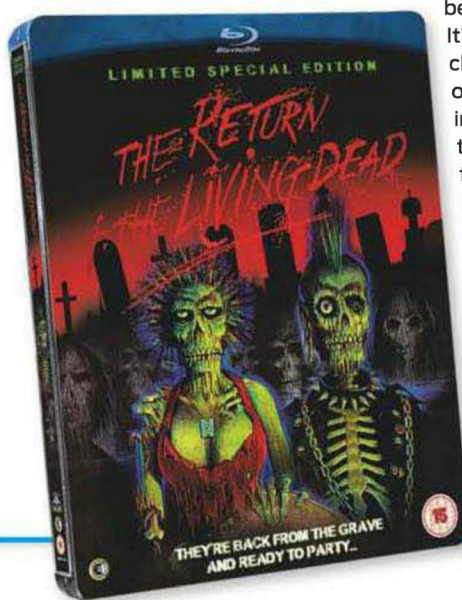
What a lovely vision you have Jon. Unfortunately, we don't anticipate

auto-calibration coming to projectors any time soon – particularly at those around and below the £2,000 mark. For it to work properly, it would need to be

extremely clever, taking into account the positioning of the screen (and its gain), the positioning of the projector, ambient light conditions and the various sources it's being fed.

It's much easier and cheaper to shove a couple of speakers and a USB input in the chassis to add to a budget projector's feature count. And the built-in picture presets are probably of good-enough quality for most users anyway.

But what about at the other end of the price scale? Well, buyers of SIM2's Lumis 3D-S and Nero projectors get the brand's Live Colors Calibration 2.0 software thrown in –



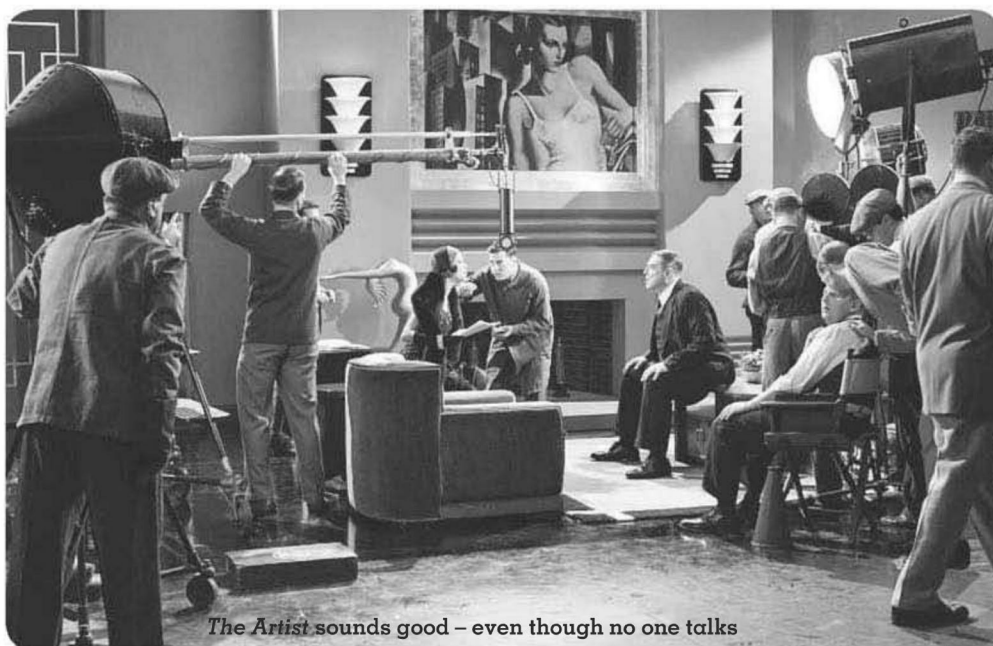
people don't have their PC in their living room, so 'net access from a TV is quite handy), we take your point about AV receivers.

Most of the mass-market AV brands seem quite committed to adding features to their AVRs and repositioning them as a 'home hub', when Smart TVs are doing much of the same thing. On the other hand, it's not as if you're being made to pay much for these goodies. Receivers such as Yamaha's RX-V671 can be bought for as little as £275 – and that model offers seven-channel amplification and six HDMI inputs, as well as DLNA support, 'net radio and direct Napster access.

It's interesting that you pick on HDMI upscaling as a feature you have no need for. Thinking about it, this isn't something that gets much use amongst the HCC team, either – as you say, our video sources are all hi-def anyway. It's very much a legacy feature (and now being replaced by 4K upscaling!). Denon feels your pain – its AVR-1912 (again selling for around £275 online) gives HDMI upscaling a wide berth. It doesn't do Spotify either

but while this offers control over almost every aspect of setup, it's not automatic. You'll need to be a calibration boffin to get the best out of it. We assume the logic here is: if you're spending upwards of £20,000 on a projector, you can probably afford to have a professional pop round and install it for you.

Winner: Star Letter-writer Ion Mitchell wins a copy of *The Return of the Living Dead* on Blu-ray, courtesy of our friends at Second Sight. This Limited Edition Steelbook is available to buy from June 4, and comes complete with five hours of special features and both the original and remixed soundtracks. It's released on DVD on the same day, too, with the same bonus features



– maybe it's the one you were told not to buy...

The Artistry of sound

Richard Stevenson (HCC 207) seems to have missed the point of *The Artist* somewhat. It's a 'silent movie' but that only means it doesn't have dialogue – I'm pretty certain that it has a score, so you'll still need speakers to enjoy it! And black and white images still need to look good in hi-def.

Jamie Thomson, via email

Obviously, Richard was over-egging things somewhat in the name of comedy. And, as our Blu-ray review on page 99 shows, *The Artist*'s speechless soundtrack is pretty good.

Kermit asks...

Hello, can you please help a puppet out. I've been given so much advice my head is spinning – can you answer the following...

1. Do I have to keep speaker cables the same length or not?
2. Will I get better sound from amp and speakers with cable like QED silver, or will some 390-strand cable from eBay work just as well?
3. Will speaker spikes help with floorstanding speakers?
4. If I cannot put my seating the same distance from all speakers will it make a huge difference? I am using 7.1.
5. Can I use two subs from one amp connection? If yes – how?

Thank you for your time and advice.

Paul the muppet, via email

Richard Stevenson replies:

Hi Paul. The simple answer is yes, probably, definitely, yes, and yes, with a splitter – but let me explain.

1. Speaker cable length: Theoretically, an electrical signal does not so much travel down a cable as shunt down it like a Newton's Cradle.

This suggests that it would not matter if the cable was five feet or five metres long, because the signal will arrive at the speaker at pretty much the same time anyway. However, the longer the cable the greater its resistance, inductance and capacitance. Your amplifier will see quite a different impedance load with a longer cable than a shorter one. As most amplifiers are sensitive to this load, by keeping the speaker cables the same length you will ensure exactly the same performance on each channel. Of course, that is quite tricky in a real-world seven-channel system, so at the very least try to keep cables to the front three main speakers the same length.

You may find that you can't perceive any benefit at all, but it's better to be safe than sorry.

2. Speaker cable quality: Risking getting the can opener out to this particular tin of worms, the answer is yes, you

will most likely get a better result from better-quality branded cable. This is simply because companies like QED spend a lot of time testing cable materials and geometry to get the best sonic performance from their products – whereas your 390-strand eBay special has been developed with all the attention to sonic detail as B&Q's own bell-wire. It's not quite that cut and dried, though, because the cost of good cable, particularly in the sort of lengths required for a 7.1 channel system, can get very pricey. In many cases upgrading your AVR and using cheaper cable would be a better bet. I have also had really good sound using basic 2.5mm flat twin and earth mains wiring cable for speaker connections, so it isn't necessarily the case that more expensive cables *always* sound better. Try the QED silver cables on your main left/right speakers and see if you like the result before cabling the whole system. If not, sell them on eBay and try the 390-strand instead.

3. Speaker spikes: I once wrote a whole article on why the spike was the most important development in loudspeaker design in the last 40 years! Yes, you definitely need spikes. Bringing good old Newton back in again, every action has an equal and opposite reaction

46 LETTERS

— meaning your speaker cabinets want to vibrate back and forth with exactly the same energy as their driver cones. To get the best sound it is imperative to keep the speaker cabinet itself as fixed as possible and the spike is the tool of choice to achieve that. They pierce carpets, which would otherwise allow an un-spiked speaker to rock about, and they are easily adjusted to take up variations in the floor and get the speaker level. Most importantly, the pointy bits exert tremendous force onto the floor, ensuring the greatest rigidity for your speaker. Some say spikes also give sound improvement by grounding out speaker cabinet vibrations to the floor. Others say they don't. Either way, by far the greatest benefit of spikes is in keeping the speaker as rigid as possible.

4. Unequal seating distance: If you have ever suffered the ignominy of a commercial cinema seat way off to one side near the back of the auditorium, you will know just how unpleasant it is to watch a movie accompanied by nothing but one-sided rear-channel effects. The physics of sound propagation dictates that as you move further away from a sound source it will be quieter, dropping approximately 3dB for each doubling of distance.

Irrespective of all the fancy EQ systems that measure multiple points in your listening room, if you set the system up to be balanced in the middle then someone sitting one metre away from the left surround speaker and three metres from the right will get a seriously left-biased sound. Moreover, for this unfortunate person in the wings the channel delay for the left surround speaker will be too long and the delay for the right surround channel too short, confusing the spatial imaging of the rear effects. In home cinemas there is usually just one hot spot seat, not necessarily equidistant from all speakers but the seat from which you measured and set up the system in the first place. Everyone else is in the cheap



The kid on the floor knows where the family's Panasonic system will sound its best

seats. Exactly the same is true of commercial multiplexes and if I cannot guarantee seat G13 or G14 in my local cinema, I simply don't go.

5. Two subwoofers: You can use two subwoofers from a single LFE AVR output by using a 1-phono to 2-phono plug splitter/adaptor. This attaches to your amp LFE output and a long run of interconnect cable goes to each sub. Then re-run the setup procedure — as simply adding another sub with the same settings will result in the LFE being too loud.

While this is simple in theory, LFE is a tricky beast to control. Running two subs may simply double problems in your room like boom and suck-outs, where outgoing and reflected bass sounds cancel each other out. If you have some flexibility in where you place subwoofers, trial and error may well throw up some interesting results.

The great acoustician Floyd E Toole suggests one LFE sub to either side of the room may be best for accuracy, while placing them in the front corners would be best for overall bass power. Having experimented with every conceivable setup, from no subwoofer at all to 10 subs in the system (one for each of the seven channels and three running LFE), I can say with absolute certainty there is no hard and fast rule as to what will work best for every room.

Currently I am using just one very large subwoofer — as that is simply the easiest to get sounding right.

Fight club

Having been surprised to read my own letter in *HCC* 206, I was rather bemused by Giles Manton's response in *HCC* 207. I'm sure you won't continue printing this [*why not? — Ed*], but I'm compelled to retort to his wrongful assumptions and his inferred authority on the hobby that he's been hooked on for 20 years.

I'm missing the point of the hobby because I don't want to see humongous speakers? Performance of said speakers better than concealed? Meeow and not roar? Hmmn. Bowers and Wilkins engineers, among others, would surely have something to say about that. And I would go back to one of my key points; one doesn't go into a commercial cinema and see the speakers — but when was the last time anyone thought their concealed speakers 'meeowed'? Most of a movie is dialogue and where does it come from? The centre of the screen. Precisely where one of my three B&W Signature speakers is.

As for 'techie elves' developing a home cinema solution, mine was developed by me. I researched every piece of kit, personally. I researched design, room dimensions, sound

insulation, screen types, masks and size. I spoke to technical people, soliciting advice about the details that are vital, like matching projectors with suitable screen gains. I went to enormous lengths to ensure that I ended up with a good small theatre. Giles obviously wouldn't like it. But I'm not sure anyone who's ever been in it thought I'd missed the point. Indeed, my father-in-law has a BAFTA (it resides in our house!), won many years ago when he was a film and TV producer, and he's watched numerous films in my home cinema with friends from the industry — and I don't think anybody used the word 'meeow'.

I've been into AV for 40 years and I have lusted after every piece of kit I have ever bought. Nobody should presume that, because I can't see my home cinema hardware, I don't love having it. And finally, for the record, I don't live in a mansion, (it's actually a cottage that's been extended) and I don't have a wine cellar — but I do run a wine company, so maybe that will make Giles feel better. Or worse.

Steve Russell, via email

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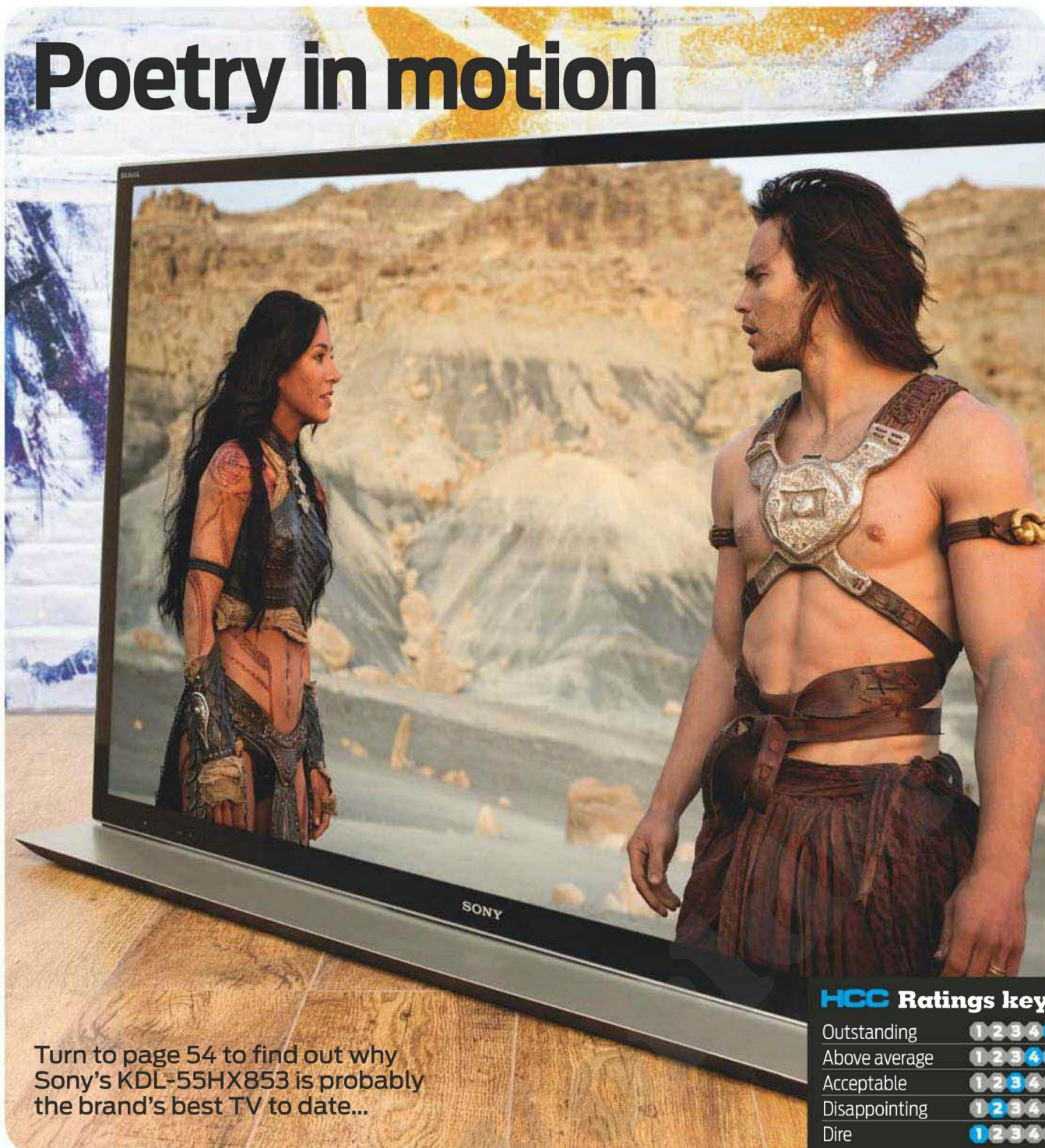
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REVIEWS

→ **Hardware highlights** WHARFEDALE Compact 5.1 system packs a real punch
 PIONEER Feature-packed 7.1-channel AVR RUNCO Mass-market projector with high-end heritage
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 LG Style-conscious one-box cinema system GROUPTEST 46/47in LED TV shootout **AND MORE!**

Poetry in motion



Turn to page 54 to find out why Sony's KDL-55HX853 is probably the brand's best TV to date...

HCC Ratings key

Outstanding	1 2 3 4 5
Above average	1 2 3 4 5
Acceptable	1 2 3 4 5
Disappointing	1 2 3 4 5
Dire	1 2 3 4 5

50 PIONEER VSX-922 → Approx £550

Digital diva

Richard Stevenson finds Pioneer's latest AV receiver is suited to all his sources – and is backed up by the best control app in the business

The new VSX-922 sports the familiar Pioneer design



May saw Pioneer doing its traditional launch of a new range of AV receivers. As usual, the lower- and mid-range models break cover first – and the VSX-922 reviewed exclusively here is one of the latter.

Last season's VSX-921 bagged the EISA award for best European Home Theatre Receiver, and the Japanese brand will hope the VSX-922 can

be in the running for the same accolade. This new contender is not a radical departure, however. It's best described as just a lightly fettled and updated version of last year's receiver. If it ain't broke don't fix it.

The key premise of Pioneer's latest receivers is mating potent processing and beefy power with seamless network integration. Not exactly a new concept, I grant

you, but one which Pioneer has polished to perfection better than any other brand to date. It matters not whether you want to use a standard HDMI input, AirPlay, an Apple i-device, USB or DLNA server – the VSX-922 treats them all like normal inputs and brings them together under its classy GUI, or the absolutely stunning 2012 version of the Pioneer iControlAV App.

HDMI upgrade

A quick scan of the features list might make you think the VSX-922's actual hardware has changed little, but what alterations have been made are important. Pioneer has obviously

'The premise of Pioneer's latest receivers is mixing potent power with seamless networking'

taken criticism of the VSX-921 onboard and increased the HDMI input count from four to six (all v1.4 3D-compatible). This adds immediate flexibility and will be a major bonus to most buyers.

The HDMI inputs are now each equipped with a stand-by pass through mode, too, so you can view sources without having to power up the receiver. Both Denon and Yamaha offer this on their AVRs and it's good to see Pioneer following suit – not only can it help save on your power bill, it means fewer angry yelps from technophobe family members who want to watch TV without having to work two remote controls.

The VSX-922 has the same 7x150W claimed power output and a cosmetic appearance that could be an identical twin to its predecessor. You still get Pioneer's excellent MCACC room EQ with Standing Wave Control, you still get the naff plastic set-up mic, and the dull remote is also virtually identical.

One major change is analogue connectivity. As a sign of the times, this has taken a nose dive. I have never seen a mid-priced AVR with so few phono sockets on the back. Does this matter to you? Probably not.

What has been upwardly revised for 2012 is predominantly in the operation and firmware. Upscaling is improved via Pioneer's Advanced Video Adjust suite, which includes 1080p24 video conversion as well as the brand's Stream Smoother. This

Remote:
Packed with buttons – use the iControl AV app if you can



AV/CV

PRODUCT: Seven-channel AVR with 6-in/1-out HDMI

POSITION: Below the VSX-1022 in Pioneer's 2012 lineup

PEERS: Yamaha RX-V773; Onkyo TX-NR809



enhances low bit-rate video sources, such as YouTube footage. I put it to the test with said online service, and, sure enough, found videos noticeably smoothed, making them easier on the eye with less artefacting.

The networking of the VSX-922 is simply seamless, connecting to any one of my five AirPlay sources (I've

'The Pioneer ripped into movies and music with lightning speed and a feisty, upbeat presentation'

been Apple-ized), two DNL servers or, using the supplied cable, the iPhone without so much as a stutter.

Return of the MCACC

Once I'd finished faffing around on my home network, it was time to get into the fine-tuning and acoustic tweaking that is Pioneer's MCACC, now with Phase Control and tuning for one or even two subwoofers. This receiver gets what is pretty much Pioneer's top-of-the-line MCACC system complete with the 'pro' EQ setup. The process is rather long-winded compared to many of its rivals – each channel is fired up in sequence at least five times to test

polarity, measure for the EQ, Phase and Standing Wave Control and then set channel levels.

That is pretty much it for setup via the GUI as, for no easily explainable reason, a lot of features are only accessible from the fascia display. Pressing 'audio parameter' or 'video parameter' gets you to the lip-sync adjustment (auto and manual) and upscaling controls, for example, which I would have thought were primary functions for the GUI.

Perhaps an answer to this is Pioneer's all-new 2012 iControl AV App. This is not an update on the old iControl AV versions (which won't work with 2012 models, confusingly) and requires you to download a whole new app. It's worth it, though. The iPad version of iControl AV 2012 is not just good, it is way, way ahead of every other AV kit-maker on the planet in terms of its operation, appearance, depth of control, usability and overall wow factor. Yes, all the usual operation features are in there, like selecting source and sound format, but the app adds a layer of adjustments that can only otherwise be tweaked from the front panel.

The innovative Sound Explorer tab offers a wealth of features, such as dialogue enhancement, phase control and virtual depth,

Connections

A Six of the best

These six HDMI inputs should be enough to cover all your hi-def sources, although one on the front would have been appreciated. There's only a single HDMI output, too, meaning those with both a TV and projector aren't catered for

B Back of the 'net

With Wi-Fi hookup requiring an optional module, you may find yourself using the VSX-922's Ethernet jack

C Just the two of us

Digital audio inputs are limited to one optical and one coaxial – but do you really need more?

C Decision time

The VSX-922's sixth and seventh channels can be used for a second audio zone, traditional surround back speakers or height/width processing

→ Analysis



GUI: The VSX-922's onscreen menus are colourful and responsive, but annoyingly they don't cover all the tweaking options available. You have to use either the front panel display or the iControl AV app

Killer feature: Pioneer's new receiver effortlessly connects to AirPlay devices and DLNA servers – multimedia usability is high

→ Specifications

Dolby TrueHD: YES and Dolby Digital Plus

DTS-HD Master Audio: YES and DTS Neo:6

THX: NO

Multichannel input: NO

Multichannel output (claimed): 7 x 150W

Multiroom: YES One extra audio zone

AV inputs: YES 3 x composite; 4 x analogue stereo; 2 x digital audio (1 x optical and 1 x coaxial)

HDMI: YES 6-in, 1-out v1.4

Video upscaling: YES to 1080p

Component video: YES 1 x input

Dimensions: 435(w) x 363(d) x 168(h)mm

Weight: 10kg

Also featuring: iControlAV 2012 App; DLNA networking; AirPlay; Phase Control; Standing Wave control; iPod/iPhone integration; AVNavigator electronic interactive instruction manual; Bluetooth and Wi-Fi optional modules; Stream Smoother video processing; WAV and FLAC playback up to 192kHz/24-bit; manual on CD



presented as bouncing balloons that lock and offer dial-like adjustments when pressed. At the time of writing there's a bug that closes the app if you attempt to look at the MCACC EQ graphs but I'm sure this will be sorted soon. Actually, the iControl AV 2012 App is so cool you could spend all night playing with it and not watch a movie. This is the template that other manufacturers should be looking to replicate.

Getting in sync

Once I had located the lip-sync delay in the fascia menu I still struggled to get sync between sound and picture. The setting resulted in a delay quite a way from ideal and made movies sound detached and unwatchable. Some tweaking of the manual adjustment was required, and by trial and error the audio and video came together. Manual lip-sync is not a huge issue and only has to be done the once but on such a techy AVR it's a pain.

Moreover the sheer number of adjustments in the iControl AV 2012 App can get you in all sorts of acoustic bother. By the time I had my real height channels mated with virtual wides and virtual surround back channels, engaged the standard MCACC EQ, boosted the dialogue

enhancement, adjusted the virtual depth to max and tweaked the variable x-curve, I ended up with a veritable dog's dinner. And Pedigree Chum it wasn't. The sound stage was massive, at least twice the size of my listening room, but presentation was phasey and unnatural.

Stripping everything back to basics and leaving just the EQ engaged, the Pioneer ripped into movies and music with lightning speed and a feisty, upbeat presentation. The top-end was crisp and well extended and managed to keep just on the right side of aggressive. The bottom-end was just as well extended and with stereo music (no subwoofer) the LF response was rich and fulsome with great attacking punch. Lana Del-Ray romped into the room with such authority I had to check the sub was not engaged.

But it is with movies that the VSX-922 really shines. Throughout the *Aliens Anthology* (Blu-ray) it created a huge soundstage, epic bass effects and brought the extra-terrestrial atmosphere and tension to life. As the Alien head dribbled and breathed in big-screen close up, coming within inches of Ripley's head, the sound was intense and tangible. The VSX-922 all but urges you to shrink into the sofa and pull a cushion up over your face.

Stepping up the pace even further with *Super 8* (Blu-ray), this AVR drove the train crash into the room in an all-channel festival of effects. The main action was pulled up to centre of the screen (thanks to the height channels) and I was treated to a seamless 360-degree immersion. Sadly, the Pioneer's presentation does nothing to enhance the twee Spielbergisms that grate in an otherwise fine film.

Inherent character

So, playing with the many settings in the iControlAV 2012 App does add layers of enhancement, mostly space to the soundstage, but it is the Pioneer's inherent character of speed and clarity that really shine through. Some may find it a little too clinical, too Far Eastern in its tuning, but that comes down to personal preference.

Regardless, this is clearly an AVR with a lot going for it. The extra HDMI's are welcome, the room EQ setup, though lengthy, is first-rate and the smart device control is blistering. I had a few awkward moments with it, but generally it's a slick performer. Worth an audition



HCC VERDICT

Pioneer VSX-922 → £550 Approx

→ Supplier: www.pioneer.co.uk

→ Tel: 01753 789789

Highs: Packed with features; awesome app control; fast and exciting sound

Lows: Can sound feisty with forward speakers; possibly too many audio tweaks; limited GUI

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Because image is everything

Sony's new flagship flatscreen is poetry in motion, says **Steve May**, thanks in part to some magic called X Reality Pro

It's no exaggeration to say that Sony enjoyed a bumpy 2011. Quite apart from its well documented financial ills, the brand's sprawling TV range was wildly inconsistent, with not even top-flight models escaping criticism.

So the company has rationalised its range and thrown renewed vigour into image engineering. The first consequence of this redirection is the 55in KDL-HX853. It effectively represents a new high-ground for the iconic marque, at least until a replacement for the KDL-HX923 is unveiled; it even comes with an agreeable £1,800 price ticket.

The set is elegant in the extreme, reclining back on its base, ostensibly for positioning on a low stand. This balancing act is quite a dramatic design element, as the pedestal appears wafer thin. Even more surprisingly, the set's main sound system is squashed within. Two forward-firing speakers powered by 10W of amplification have been shoehorned inside. Should owners choose to wall-mount, downward-firing speakers in the screen cabinet come into play. A third, rear-facing mid-range driver is used both on stand and off, bringing the total audio output to 30W.

Redefining what's Smart

Sony has also splashed a fresh coat of paint across its online portal. Now

known as the Sony Entertainment Network (or SEN), it touts a fresh, blocky user interface which corrals content into handy groups, labelled apps, movies and music. The former includes a comprehensive selection of catch-up and scrap, including BBC iPlayer, BBC News, Sky News, YouTube, Demand 5, LOVEFiLM, Netflix, Skype, Mubi and Muzi. There are other services with equally silly names, but many of these are little more than archival vaults. The never-changing Sony Television Network is still trumpeting the same episodes of *Diff'rent Strokes* and *I Dream of Jeanie* offered years ago.

Once you get beyond the re-skinned UI, though, there's little change to the actual content presentation, and problems with Search remain. Hopefully this will be addressed in the coming months, when a new content-rich programme EPG with contextual search arrives via firmware update.

This Bravia set also introduces the Opera TV store. Historically, apps have never really played a big role in Sony's Smart ensemble, but that's beginning to change. A deal with the browser barons at Opera means it can now offer a supply of casual games (Chess, Backgammon, Solitaire), plus streaming music services such as Aupeol.

One aspect of this set that's identical to last year is multimedia file compatibility; and unfortunately it's an area where Sony continues to lag behind rivals Samsung and LG. While AVI, MOV and MP4 all play there's still no friendly embrace for MKV, either from USB or across a LAN from a NAS.

By way of compensation, Sony offers Homestream, a free download

for Windows and Mac which performs on-the-fly file conversion to any connected device that it holds a rendering profile for. Of course, this does require you keep a PC on at all times if you want a fully-integrated networked home theatre.

A more welcome development is the Wi-Fi Direct mode. This supports exclusive communication between the TV and a local device, without any need to burden your main Wi-Fi network. I paired the HX853 with Sony's Tablet S and was able to share content by literally sliding it from the tablet to the main screen. Sony calls this DLNA sleight of hand 'Catch and throw.' It could catch on.

Picture perfect

If the boffins at Sony's Tokyo HQ plan on rebuilding their reputation as purveyors of fine imagery, they're off to a cracking start with this model. Picture quality is outstanding, not only in terms of depth and detail, but motion clarity. Plenty of tellies offer speedy frame-rate processing, but very few can manage it with barely a sniff of smudgy artefacting.

The Motionflow XR800 system employed here utilises a trio of techniques to minimise predictive artefacts: frame insertion, backlight blinking and image blur reduction. These are offered up in a variety of modes which mix and match to various effect. You can choose from Clear, Clear Plus, Smooth, Standard and Impulse.

With 50Hz broadcasts, the Motionflow processor interpolates three new intermediate images between each pair of original frames, giving what Sony describe as a 'quad' frame rate. On 24fps movies from Blu-ray, seven intermediate images ➤

AV/CV

PRODUCT: Designer 3D Active Shutter Smart LED TV

POSITION: Top of Sony's current connected TV range

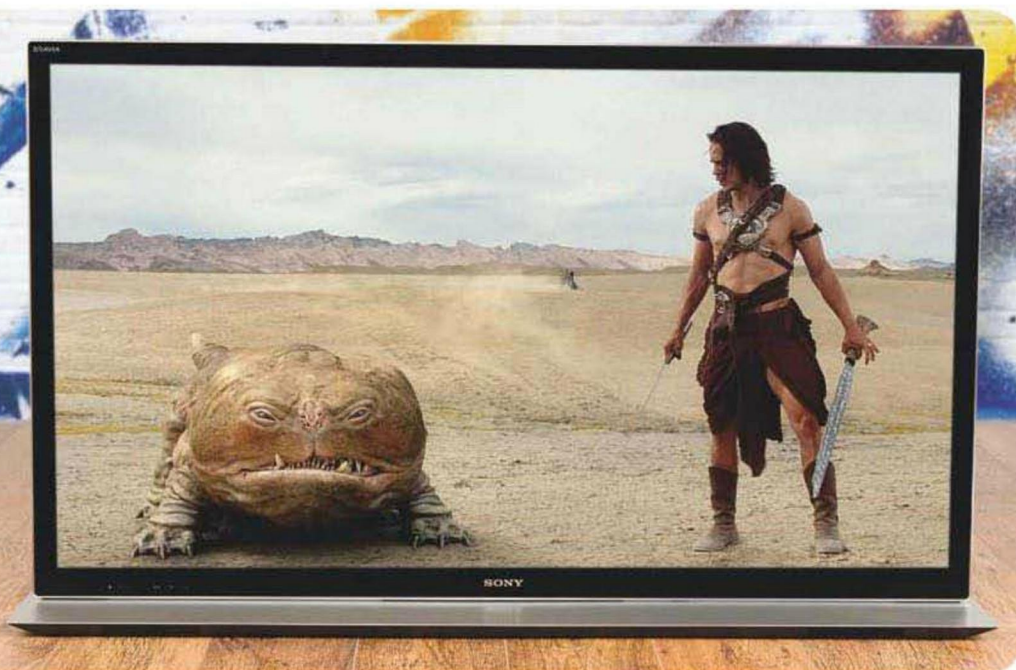
PEERS: LG 55LM760T; Samsung UE55D6530



HOME
CINEMA
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'Picture quality is outstanding,
not only in terms of depth and
detail, but motion clarity'



are inserted between each pair of original frames.

A key part of the panel's success with motion can be attributed to line blinking technology, which selectively darkens horizontal strips of the panel's backlight, from top to bottom, synchronised with the video image, thereby eliminating LCD's distinctive afterimage.

After much experimentation, I decided that Clear gave me the best option for generic TV and sports coverage, mixing interpolation with backlight blinking and backlight control. Test footage of a passing train kept passengers sitting at windows in sharp relief, while a cantering horse, usually ringed by predictive artefacts, appeared clean and sharp.

Perhaps the strangest option is Motionflow Impulse. Sony deems it particularly effective for sport, but as it appears to combine flicker with icy smoothness, I suspect this combination could well prove headache-inducing. With movie material delivered at 24fps from Blu-ray, Impulse repeats each frame twice, and the result is rather more agreeable. *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian* avoided the tell-tale 'soap opera effect', yet was sharp enough to highlight the shonky CGI.

Backlight uniformity from this edge-lit set is reasonably good given the size of the panel. Yet localised dimming can be seen working behind some dimly-lit scenes.

Of course, what most buyers will notice is the detail, which is astoundingly good (I was going to say

Sonic slice:
The leanback stand houses the HX853's speaker drivers

Remote:
Nothing too complicated, with a traditional layout



it reminded me of 4K footage seen on Toshiba's ZL2 über-screen, but decided against that as you'd think me foolish). Shadow detail is also enticingly deep. Make sure, though, that you ease brightness back from the default and take the gas off the sharpness pedal.

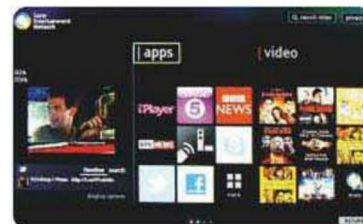
Extra clarity can also be seen in the set's stereoscopy, courtesy of the brand's 3D Super Resolution image processing tech. However, this doesn't resolve basic issues with crosstalk, which remain apparent. Sony's optional shuttering glasses prove to be very susceptible to colour shift and ghosting, depending on how you angle your head. Doze off during *The Smurfs* and you might awaken to find that the TV appears to have inexplicably split in two.

This Bravia only really fumbles the ball when it comes to audio. That swish stand may look the biz, but the noise it makes is far from pretty. There's a thin, nasal tone to the output which will have you short-listing sound systems in no time.

Conclusion

While there are still areas for improvement (principally multimedia file compatibility, 3D performance and sound), the KDL-55HX853 can be considered a winner when it comes to IPTV provision and raw picture quality. Indeed, it leads the field in motion clarity and if sport is a paramount interest, you'll be hard pressed to find a better team player. The fact that it retails for a surprisingly affordable £1,800 is another feather in its cap.

→Analysis



GUI: The Sony Entertainment Network interface majors on big icons, and groups 'net content into apps, movies and music

Power consumption: We measured an average of 85W, with 12W in active standby mode

Killer feature: The KDL-55HX853 offers best-in-class motion clarity, with artefacting kept to a minimum and resolution retained

→Specifications

3D: YES Active shutter (glasses are optional)

Full HD: YES 1,920 x 1,080

Tuner: YES Freeview HD

Smart TV: YES Sony Entertainment Network

Connections: 4 x HDMI; 1 x component; 1 x D-Sub PC input; 1 x USB; 1 x Ethernet

Sound: 3 x 10W

Brightness: NA

Contrast ratio: NA

Dimensions (off stand): 1,294(w) x 772(h) x 29(d)mm

Weight (off stand): 21.7kg

Features: LED edge backlighting; USB media playback; Sony Entertainment Network smart portal, featuring BBC iPlayer, Netflix, YouTube, Dailymotion, Acetrax, LOVEFILM, BBC News, Sky News, Facebook Twitter & more; Motionflow XR800 frame-rate tech; 3D Super Resolution; leanback stand; Wi-Fi Direct



HCC VERDICT

Sony KDL-55HX853 → £1,800 Approx

→ Supplier: www.sony.co.uk

→ Tel: 08705 111999

Highs: Outstanding image processing; artefact-free frame-rate frippery; stylish Monolith design; content-packed entertainment portal

Lows: Crosstalk still an issue with 3D content; thin, nasal sonics; no support for MKV

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Maintaining the Diamond standard

Taking their design cues from Wharfedale's Diamond 10.1 standmount speakers, the brand's latest compact satellites offer a performance that belies their size. Big-box fanatic **Danny Phillips** is impressed

The DX-1 HCP looks its best with the grilles removed



Wharfedale is an elder statesman of the audio world, with decades' worth of expertise to plough into its hi-fi and home cinema kit. The latest recipient of its sonic wisdom is the DX-1 HCP, a compact 5.1 speaker system priced to lure the budget buyer – hopefully without compromising on sound quality.

Systems like these are an excellent introduction to home cinema with their affordable prices and space-efficient designs, but the market is fiercely competitive. Big guns like Tannoy, Boston Acoustics, KEF and Canton offer great-value packages that make soundtracks

really sing, so what can the DX-1 HCP bring to the party?

The system comprises four identical compact satellites for the fronts and rears, a dedicated centre and the Moviestar DX-1 active subwoofer. The satellites' design inspiration is Wharfedale's Diamond 10.1 standmount, with gently curved sides and a high-gloss white finish that radiates contemporary elegance. A gloss-black finish is also available for those with mucky fingers. For extra pizzazz yank out the grilles from their plug fixings and you'll uncover some stunning silver cone surrounds.

The cabinets feel substantial and robust. Affordable they may be but

Wharfedale has clearly channelled as much of the cost as possible into their construction – a foundation on which good sound quality is always built.

Each satellite uses a two-way driver arrangement, comprising a 3in mid/bass driver fashioned from woven propylene, and a 0.75in silk dome tweeter.

Placing them around the room on furniture shouldn't be a problem due to their compact dimensions, and thanks to the infinite baffle (sealed box) design you can plonk them close to the wall without any acoustic repercussions. In fact, you can even hang them on the wall ➤

AV/CV

PRODUCT:

Affordable 5.1-channel compact speaker system

POSITION:

Entry-level

PEERS:

KEF KHT-1505; Tannoy TFX; Boston Acoustics SoundWare XS SE





Cable tidy: Wharfedale's satellites feature metal binding posts rather than springclip terminals

using the keyhole brackets on the back. Metal binding posts on each speaker are another small but satisfying sign of the system's quality.

The centre speaker is larger than the sats and arranged horizontally for easy under-the-TV placement. Build quality is every bit as solid as the other sats. The driver array is different however, with two mid/bass drivers to give dialogue added kick.

The centre uses an aperiodic loading system, which means the speaker enclosure has a reflex port on the back that's stuffed with

'Wharfedale has hit pay dirt with the DX-1 HCP – a stylish 5.1 system that delivers a kick-ass sound'

damping material (in this case a foam bung), controlling the airflow. Sounds unusual, but there's method in the madness. Allowing air to leak from the vent in this way means the enclosure can be smaller than if it was a sealed box (vital for a compact array like this) but keep better control over low frequencies.

The Moviestar DX-1 subwoofer is another design triumph. It's one of the smallest, cutest subs around, jazzyed up with some rounded-off edges. A cluster of controls lurk around the back, including volume and crossover dials and a phase inversion switch, alongside two

phono inputs for connection to your AVR. Its dimensions may be modest but the spec is solid – a 150W Class D amplifier and a front-firing, 8in long-throw bass cone.

Best in class

After probing the Wharfedale with a range of movies and music, it's clear that it's up there with the best systems in this price class. To me, the mark of a great compact package is its ability to deliver a sound bigger than its dimensions suggest, and the DX-1 HCP does just that.

Thor's DTS-HD Master Audio Blu-ray track hammers home the point, providing clear evidence of the Wharfedale package's size-defying power. When Sir Anthony Hopkins' Odin hits his staff on the floor during Thor's coronation, the thump is thick and authoritative, rolling around the soundstage with a long, atmospheric echo.

The ensuing pursuit of the invading Frost Giants showcases more of this solid bass work, alongside crisp mids and highs that fire across the expansive soundstage. It's thrilling stuff, managing to sound aggressive and dynamic without stepping over the line into harshness.

Push the volume really high and it strains slightly, yet you'd have to be some sort of masochist to listen at the level I'm talking about. Keep it sane and the Wharfedale array remains smooth as silk.

Shifts from tense, talky stand-offs to full-blooded action are delivered with impressive speed, and when the action gets really feisty, the DX-1 HCP conducts the chaos with confidence. Thor's revenge attack on the Frost Giants is ten minutes of pure brutality that the system takes in its stride. There's an even tonality across the entire array, making steering seem smooth and ensuring a focused, unified soundstage. Effects placement is terrific, and high frequencies have a crisp, airy quality, sprinkling a delicate layer of detail onto every scene.

None of this would be possible without the talented sub, which anchors it all with lean, purposeful bass notes that fuse tightly to the satellites. This little bass box is a revelation, doing its job without making a song and dance about it.

The centre speaker tops off this pleasing performance nicely. Dialogue is communicated with clarity and focus, beefed up by solid low frequencies. So when Odin starts barking at his foolhardy son, or King

Laufey sneers in his deep voice, both sound rich and realistic.

Great value

Wharfedale has hit pay dirt with the DX-1 HCP. Not only is it a stylish and solidly-built 5.1 system that takes up precious little space, it also delivers a kick-ass performance. Movies sound bigger and bolder than you might expect given the size of the speakers, plus it teases out plenty of detail and underpins it all with natural-sounding bass. And at just £400 it's also great value, giving Wharfedale an advantage in the face of such stiff competition ●

→ Specifications

DX-1 Satellites

Drive units: 1 x 3in woven propylene mid/bass driver; 1 x 0.75in silk dome tweeter
Frequency response: 120Hz-20kHz
Sensitivity: 84dB
Power handling: 20-80W
Dimensions: 122(w) x 190(h) x 123(d)mm
Weight: 1.8kg

DX-1 Centre

Drive units: 2 x 3in woven propylene mid/bass drivers; 1 x 0.75mm silk dome tweeter
Frequency response: 80Hz-20kHz
Sensitivity: 86dB
Power handling: 30-100W
Dimensions: 292(w) x 122(h) x 123(d)mm
Weight: 2.5kg

DX-1 Subwoofer

Drive units: 1 x 8in long-throw cone
Frequency response: 20-200Hz
On board power: 150W (RMS)
Dimensions: 285(w) x 335(h) x 320(d)mm
Weight: 8.6kg
Connections: Stereo line in; LFE line in



HCC VERDICT

Wharfedale DX-1 HCP → £400 Approx
 → Supplier: www.wharfedale.co.uk
 → Tel: 01480 452561

Highs: Solid build; compact design and neat styling; large-scale sound
Lows: Slight straining at very loud volumes

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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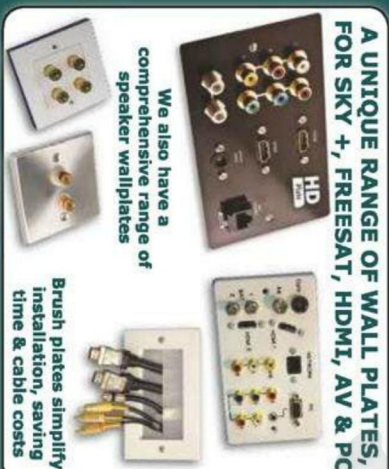


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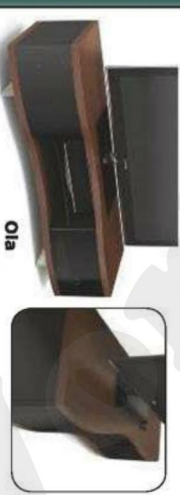
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System MASH up

Panasonic has revisited its noise-shaping tech of the past to give its latest cinema system a helping hand. **Danny Philips** likes what he hears

All-in-one systems are usually designed for maximum convenience and minimum cost, often with scant regard for sound quality. But Panasonic's new-for-2012 SC-BTT590 is a different kettle of fish – a one-box Blu-ray system

that puts the emphasis on performance with an array of high-quality audio components.

The SC-BTT590's 'premium audio parts' (as Panasonic describes them) include innovative new speaker cones, drivers and cabinets, plus a topography inside the main Blu-ray

receiver designed to keep interference to a minimum.

It's a 5.1-channel system and comes with 403mm-high tabletop satellites as opposed to floorstanding towers – if that's what you're after, opt for the alternative SC-BTT490.

AV/CV

PRODUCT:
5.1-channel
all-in-one 3D
Blu-ray system

POSITION:
Panasonic's
flagship system

PEERS:
Samsung
HT-E6750W;
Sony
BDV-E880;
LG BH8220B



Design-wise, the SC-BTT590 is attractive without going overboard. The four identical front and rear satellites are styled in a chic gloss-black finish with brushed silver bases and a back-sloping stem. True to its word, Panasonic has ensured these are sturdier than average all-in-one speakers, but they're still not up to the level of a dedicated system.

The passive subwoofer is light, but looks the part with its gloss black finish and compact dimensions. The centre speaker lies horizontally, which makes it equally easy to install.

As for the Blu-ray receiver, it's nigh-on identical to Panasonic's Blu-ray players and at 40mm it's equally as slim. The casing is tastefully finished in gloss black (natch) and build quality is excellent, with nice touches like the dappled top panel and front flap.

In a pop-out tray on the right hand side is an iPod dock. Under the flap are two more ways of playing media – an SD card slot and a USB port.

The rear panel doesn't skimp on connections. A 3D-ready HDMI v1.4 output is joined by two inputs for external sources, backed up by optical and analogue stereo inputs. A second USB port is provided exclusively for Panasonic's Skype communication camera (should you choose to buy one). The line-up is completed by Ethernet and a dock for the optional wireless rear speaker kit.

Bamboozled

So far so good, but it's inside these boxes where the real story lies. The satellites, for example, sport 80mm cones fashioned from a blend of bamboo and charcoal polypropylene, which has been developed to achieve

a faster, cleaner sound than previous Panasonic diaphragms, with an uneven thickness on the rear surface to suppress resonance.

A new Double Motion Damper on the speaker unit behind it aims to improve long-stroke performance, while a film capacitor inside the tweeter cuts low frequencies to ensure untainted high-frequencies.

The new anti-jitter digital amplifier is based on the MASH noise-shaping technology used by Panasonic and Technics audio products in the past, with the goal being cleaner and more accurate music playback via HDMI. And Panasonic has also lowered the subwoofer crossover point to 100Hz for better bass integration.

Its sonic credentials are further enhanced by High Clarity Sound Plus, which shuts down separate parts of the circuitry to reduce interference.

And an all-in-one system wouldn't be complete without a shedload of sound modes to play around with. 3D Cinema Surround – the zeitgeisty new name for Cinema Surround Plus – is supposed to add 25 virtual speakers to the real 5.1 channels, to create a more enveloping soundstage, both vertically and horizontally.

The SC-BTT590 also offers Digital Tube Sound, which adds extra warmth to the sound. Unlike Samsung's HT-E6750W, which combines real valves with a digital amp, it's all done in the digital domain. There are six settings, each with a different sonic character.

Away from the audio stuff you'll also find the usual smattering of network features, including Viera Connect and DLNA media streaming. 3D features include 2D-to-3D conversion, which even works with web videos. AVCHD, JPEG, MPEG-2 and MPO are supported from SD, SDHC and SDXC cards.

Operating the SC-BT590 is blissfully simple thanks to the cleverly designed menus. The attractive Home menu is a grid of nine squares with crisp HD graphics, offering direct access to all of the system's functions. Sadly the one-touch navigation system found on Panasonic's standalone players isn't possible here, but it's still slick and easy to follow.

The supplied remote is first-rate, but for a more contemporary spin download the superb iPad/Android >

Remote: The supplied handset is simple to get to grips with



app. With its virtual dials and switches, you can control every aspect of the system's functionality, with animations showing what effect selected modes will bring.

Furthermore, hi-fi fans will be in hog heaven when they tip the tablet horizontally – it switches to one of

'In terms of sound quality, it doesn't take long to realise that Panasonic's SC-BTT590 has talent'

three retro displays designed to look like audio gear from yesteryear. And with a tablet or smartphone connected, you can also access media on DLNA servers with the SC-BTT590 acting the middleman.

One of the family: The main unit retains the dappled finish of Panasonic's standalone BD players

In terms of sound quality, it doesn't take long to realise that the SC-BTT590 has talent. I threw it to the lions with *Thor*'s pulverising DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack, and what I got in return was a thrilling large-scale sound, with a level of

sonic maturity approaching that of a dedicated compact system.

Where it excels over cheaper one-box packages is the satellites' superior dynamic range – you can really hear them reaching up and tickling those high frequencies while simultaneously delving deep into the lower end of the spectrum.

Also pleasing is how crisply and cleanly they shape those mids and highs at loud volumes. The screech of alien creatures or the piercing crack of splitting rocks are forthright and aggressive yet don't curdle the eardrums. It's a smooth, composed sound that vindicates Panasonic's new driver technology.

If pushed I'd say that Samsung's HT-E6750W valve amp system has a richer, punchier character to its sound, yet the Panasonic's high-frequency handling and subtle detail retrieval is better, making it the more polished of the two. You don't have to turn the volume dial far to make an impact, either. The system gets nice and loud when only pushed halfway, giving it plenty of headroom.

3D Cinema Surround adds a palpable sense of height to certain effects and a fuller sound, but it slightly clouds the accuracy of others. Dialogue emerges loud and clear from the centre speaker.

It's not all positive though. The subwoofer level needs taming considerably to stop it sounding bloated, but even then it's a little wild, rumbling indiscriminately throughout busy action scenes.

Music playback is enjoyable (and Digital Tube Sound is worth investigating), using the sats' smoothness and detail insight to its advantage, although that added spark you get from a good separates system is missing.

This fine audio performance is backed up by excellent picture quality, the sort I've come to expect from Panasonic's Blu-ray products. There's a depth and acuity about its 2D and 3D pictures that beggars belief, particularly with stunning discs like *Avatar* and *Thor*.

Finest to date

So with a stunning array of features, polished sound quality and eye-popping pictures, the SC-BTT590 is a one-box Blu-ray system worthy of its premium price tag. It's not perfect, with a subwoofer that won't behave itself and a slightly plasticky feel to the speakers, but otherwise this is quite possibly Panasonic's finest Blu-ray system to date ■

→Analysis



GUI: The onscreen menus are pin-sharp and well organised, but more fun can be had with the app controller – which includes retro display modes (pictured)

Killer feature: The R&D spent on both Panasonic's new driver materials and the anti-jitter digital amplifier pays dividends, delivering a clean, dynamic sound

→Specifications

3D: YES

Upscaling: YES to 1080p

Connections: HDMI v1.4 output; 2 x HDMI inputs; optical digital audio input; analogue stereo input; component video output; Ethernet port; 2 x USB ports; SD card slot; FM aerial input; wireless transmitter dock

SACD/DVD-A playback: NO/NO

DTS-HD/Dolby TrueHD decoding: YES/YES

Claimed power output: 1,000W

Dimensions (main unit): 40(h) x 430(w) x 279(d)(mm)

Weight (main unit): 3kg

Features: 3D playback; DLNA media streaming; Viera Connect with Skype & BBC iPlayer; 3D Cinema Surround; built-in Wi-Fi; iPod/iPhone dock; smartphone/tablet remote app; Digital Media Renderer; USB/SD card media playback; 2D-to-3D conversion; FM radio; Anti-Jitter Digital Amplifier; Digital Tube Sound; High Clarity Sound Plus; H.Bass; Whisper Mode Surround; Centre Focus; picture presets; noise reduction; Chroma Process; Detail Clarity; Super Resolution; optional communication camera & wireless speaker kit



HCC VERDICT

Panasonic SC-BTT590 → £630
Approx → Supplier: www.panasonic.co.uk → Tel: 0844 844 3899

Highs: Smooth, polished sound quality from improved drivers; lots of features; neat operating system

Lows: Passive subwoofer lacks tightness

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



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Boxee-ing clever

Martin Pipe ponders if watching TV will ever be the same again...

Once again we have to thank the hackers for something cool. An offshoot of the XBMC multimedia player that was installed on many hacked Xboxes, Boxee adds – amongst other things – social networking integration and plugin (app) support. It's available for Windows, Linux and Apple devices, but licensed hardware products designed around the software are now available.

One such product is Iomega TV, which is built around an Intel Atom processor. In addition to Boxee, this incorporates a NAS for storing photos, video and music that can not only be played locally, but also streamed to other players or

computers on your network. Versions prefitted with 1TB and 2TB hard drives are available – or you can get a version with no local storage.

Iomega TV is compact, smart and quiet. Its front panel is distinguished only by a USB port (for local media), standby button and remote sensor. Around the back, you'll find Ethernet (integral Wi-Fi is onboard, though), HDMI, an optical digital output and analogue phono for composite video and stereo audio.

The accompanying handset is quite ingenious. On one side are basic Boxee controls; flip it over and you'll find a keyboard for entering URLs. But while it might look pretty, it's a disappointment ergonomically. The

AV/CV

PRODUCT: Media player with NAS capability

POSITION: Partnered by the Screenplay models in Iomega's range

PEERS: D-Link Boxee Box

enormous joypad buttons of the Boxee side surround a tiny OK/pause button. There's no raised 'pip' on the latter, so it's too easy to activate the wrong function.

At one time during my review it stopped working altogether, but the next morning normal behaviour had miraculously been restored – maybe an automatic software update was responsible. During the intervening period, I continued using Iomega TV courtesy of Boxee's Wi-Fi-remote Android app.

There's a web interface, but it doesn't support remote control. Instead, it deals with multimedia scanning (for the NAS DLNA server), folder/server management and



enabling the 'personal cloud' (for securely sharing files with invited internet users). AV and network settings are only available via the device's own menus. From here you can, for example, tell lomega TV what audio formats your connected equipment can handle.

Kicking and streaming

Boxee's user interface gives you some idea of how the internet is dragging TV, kicking and screaming, into the 21st century. The lower half of its home page totes recommended clips. Above these are a row of icons that access the main features. As can be expected of a platform described as a 'social media centre', one of these is labelled Friends, and allows you to recommend content to pals if your Boxee user-account is linked to Facebook and/or Twitter. 'Shows' accesses some popular programmes. Boxee seems to have some kind of relationship with Five as its more popular US fare (*CSI*, for example) can be streamed to your TV. The programmes are bookended by ads, but there are no breaks or logos.

Then there are the movies – over 1,000 of 'em, ranging from microbudget independents to Chaplin classics. Some are supported by ads, while others are tied in with subscription services. Selection is done via a Kaleidescape-style cover art/poster arrangement. Another feature – 'Apps' – provides more content. Most are American in flavour, and there are some real draws. Like *The Onion*? Then its latest spoof news reports are a couple of clicks away. Basketball followers will make a play for the NBA app, while financial obsessives will find the Wall Street Journal to their taste. Others are more international, including weather, net radio, YouTube, Flickr and RSS feeds. Some of the video is in hi-def (720p, I suspect).

Although there's specific no UK on-demand support, you can access the relevant site with the lomega TV's web browser. It supports Flash, and I was able to view BBC iPlayer programmes in HD.

During browsing sessions, the onscreen cursor is moved by gently brushing your fingers against the remote's joypad. More importantly, the text-entry box doubles as a search facility. Put in whatever you're after, and Boxee might find it.

Other features of note are 'watch later', which will remind you when new episodes of a favourite TV show (if available) are ready, and, of course, the HD-capable media player, which is compatible with all common formats and works well in all but two respects. Firstly, it won't play multiple files in a folder sequentially. Secondly, if a folder has subfolders in addition to playable content, then only the latter is accessible.

Pristine picture

Picture quality from the lomega TV can be excellent – in particular, playback of the BBC iPlayer HD and clips from *The Onion* was pristine. Sometimes, though, apps failed to complete – or some of their content wouldn't stream reliably, presumably because of network congestion. The web browser and user interface are impressively responsive, although on rare occasions my sample would stop working until a reboot was forced. As a DLNA server, lomega TV worked fine with all of the network players I tried it with – it's just a shame that you have to laboriously copy all content via the network. A device-mode USB port would have allowed lomega TV to be recognised as an external hard drive.

So, on the whole, lomega TV with Boxee is an intriguing proposition – a comprehensive media player with some neat bonus features. But it's not without its niggles.

Online adventures: lomega TV provides direct access to movies, TV and apps

Analysis



GUI: The user interface is extremely well designed, using a simplified structure and smart-looking icons
Killer feature: The file support of the lomega TV is exemplary, covering all of the most-used formats, including MKV and FLAC

Specifications

HDD: YES (1TB or 2TB – HDD-less version also available)

Connections: 1 x HDMI; 2 x USB; 1 x Ethernet; 1 x optical digital; 1 x composite video; 1 x stereo analogue audio

Video file format support: DivX3/4/5/6; XVID; H.264; VC-1; ASF; WMV9; MPEG-1/2/4; .iso/vob (DVD); .mp4; .mov; .m4v; WMV; .FLV; MKV; .ts/m2ts/mts/tp/trp

Audio file format support: MP3; WAV; WMA; OGG; AAC; AC3; DTS; FLAC; APE; Dolby Digital Plus

Image file format support: JPEG; BMP; GIF; TIFF; PNG

Dimensions: 245(w) x 35(h) x 163(d)mm

Weight: 0.9kg

Features: Boxee 'social media' platform; streaming of movies and TV programmes; runs Boxee 'apps'; web browser; 'search' function; integrates with Facebook/Twitter; onboard NAS with DLNA multimedia server (uPnP/iTunes); double-sided remote with QWERTY keypad; personal cloud; HD-capable multimedia player with comprehensive format support; integral Wi-fi (802.11b/g/n); Web interface; Intel Atom processor; third-party remote-control apps for Android and iOS; supports USB storage devices formatted as FAT32, HFS+, NTFS, EXT2, EXT3

HCC VERDICT

lomega TV with Boxee → From £210
 Approx → Supplier: tv.iomega.com

Highs: Slick user interface; excellent plenty of content available; comprehensive multimedia support

Lows: More AV output options wouldn't go amiss; some apps failed to work properly; no device-mode USB port

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Runco aims for the AV everyman

Runco's LS-1 is about as mass-market as the brand is ever going to get – but **John Archer** reckons it's still a mighty fine projector

US home theatre brand Runco is not generally associated with aggressive pricing. In fact, its most famous compromise-free products belong squarely in the 'if you need to ask how much it costs it's not for you' stratosphere. Today, though, I'm excited – and rather startled – to be testing a Runco-branded projector that even I could just about imagine affording.

The name of this wallet-friendly surprise is the LightStyle LS-1, and it can be yours for just £4,000 – a price which becomes even more eye-catching as you start to appreciate just how much the projector has in common with more expensive models higher up the LS range.

For instance, it's aesthetically identical to its LightStyle siblings, sporting the same unusual vaguely circular design, and the same imposingly large footprint. The LS-1's size is significant because it suggests a markedly better build quality and internal design than you usually get with projectors at the sub-£5k price level.

Hidden away beneath a detachable cover on the LS-1's rear

is a respectable set of connections, including two HDMI's, a component video port, a D-Sub PC port, and 12V trigger/RS-232 jacks designed to aid the professional installer who will almost certainly set your LS-1 up for you, given Runco's CI-targeted UK distribution channel, Pulse Marketing.

On the menu

It's actually handy that setting the LS-1 up won't be your responsibility, for it's one of the least user-friendly projectors I've seen. Its onscreen menus are boring to look at and so cluttered with tweaks that they're likely to have most normal users running for the technophobe hills.

When it comes to adjusting the projector's vertical image shifting, meanwhile, you have to use an allen key rather than a simple wheel or knob adjustment. To be fair, though, this unfriendly approach does allow the LS-1 to provide more image shifting precision.

There's an upside to the cluttered menus, of course – the options and tweaks they're rammed with are comprehensive enough to bag the official endorsement of the independent Imaging Science Foundation. This essentially means the LS-1 is deemed to have every key tweak a professional calibrator needs to optimise its performance to suit your room's conditions.

Considering it's the cheapest projector in Runco's LS range, it's pleasing to find the LS-1 still clinging

Remote: Bland to look at but uncluttered



on to some of the key features sported by its costlier siblings. You still get Runco's acclaimed ViVix video processing system, for instance, along with a proprietary ConstantContrast dynamic iris system and Runco's SuperOnyx tech for boosting the contrast delivered from its single-chip DLP engine.

Its 230W lamp is reasonably powerful, too – although Runco's high-end desire to always make sure its projectors produce images with

AV/CV

PRODUCT: Single-chip DLP projector driven by a 230W lamp

POSITION: The LS-1 is Runco's entry-level home cinema projector

PEERS: SIM2 Crystal 35; JVC DLA-X30



plenty of punch and dynamism means the brand only recommends that the LS-1 be used with screens in the 63in-85in size range. Mind you, I tested it on a 90in screen and didn't feel shortchanged on brightness in the slightest. In fact, I didn't feel shortchanged by the LS-1 in any department. It delivers more of Runco's traditional picture authority than I ever hoped for.

The brightness is striking for the LS-1's price point. It ensures that

images are propelled off even my neutral IMAGE screen with exemplary pop and punch. Even better, this potency at the bright end of the light spectrum is matched by deep, natural black tones.

As I would expect, given its expansive contrast range, Runco's entry-level projector is also a tasty colour performer. It delivers a more expansive range of tones than I'd normally expect to see for £4,000, and even better, it's got the

processing power to deliver the most subtle of colour nuances with startling finesse. Colour striping or blotching are things you don't have to worry about, even when watching notoriously tricky sequences like the Mines of Moria segment in *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

The LS-1's images are also exceptionally detailed and sharp when showing HD, yet there's no sense that this sharpness is in any way forced or created by sharpness ➤

Looks familiar:
Another Runco projector, another round chassis

processing. Runco's projector just happens to be extremely good at letting through every last pixel of detail from whatever hi-def source it's fed. Couple this image purity with the colour finesse noted earlier and you've immediately got a bigscreen image that exudes stability, solidity and accuracy.

Motion maestro

This LS-1's bright, sharp visuals are underpinned by some very credible motion handling. Moving images ooze fluidity and clarity. It's important to stress, too, that moving skin

people seem blissfully immune to it). There's clearly an excellent colour wheel spinning away under the LS-1's hood.

Inevitably, the LS-1 isn't completely perfect. For a start, I'd recommend you get your installer to put a bit of effort into shielding your viewing position from the high levels of fan cooling noise it produces. This sound is at least even – rather than ebbing and flowing or going up and down in tone – so easier for your brain to 'cancel out', but it's still less than ideal.

When it comes to its pictures, the only performance area that gives you a significant clue that the LS-1 is Runco's most affordable home cinema projector is shadow detailing. During the many dark scenes that populate David Fincher's *Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* remake, for instance, I did sometimes notice areas of the picture looking a touch hollow, as the projector's post-calibration picture settings failed to hold on to enough brightness to reproduce some of the subtlest shadow detail data.

You can retrieve more of this shadow detail if you ratchet up the projector's brightness output, but this takes the richness out of the black level response.

Home cinema bargain

If this pair of so-called niggles I've rustled up sound a bit desperate, that's because they are. The excellent LS-1 is something I never thought Runco would ever release: a genuine home cinema bargain. Anyone in the hunt for a mid-range 2D projector should ensnare one immediately.

'Runco's LS-1 provides a bigscreen image that exudes stability, solidity and accuracy'

tones don't suffer with any of the fizzing noise that can still appear from time to time on many single-chip DLP projectors.

This isn't the only traditional single-chip DLP flaw that the LS-1 keeps a much-appreciated lid on, either – there's also impressively little sign of rainbow effect, where stripes of pure red, green and blue either flicker over stand-out bright image elements or in the periphery of your vision, especially if you flit your eyes around the screen.

To be clear about this, I'm not saying the LS-1 is a total rainbow-free zone, but I found its appearance so rare and low-level that it scarcely troubled me at all – and I consider myself relatively susceptible to seeing rainbowning (some lucky

Wired up: RS-232 and 12V trigger jacks will aid integration of the LS-1 into your system



→ Analysis

GUI: The LS-1 is endowed with basic-looking and congested menus

Power consumption: We measured an average draw of 260W during movie playback

Killer feature: Runco's installer-friendly projectors have not previously been available at such an affordable price

→ Specifications

3D: NO

Full HD: YES 1,920 x 1,080 resolution

Component video: YES one input

HDMI: YES 2 x v1.4 inputs

12V trigger: YES

Brightness: 541 ANSI Lumens in Home Theater Calibration (CSMS)

Contrast ratio: 10,000:1 typical

Dimensions: 455(w) x 200(h) x 530(d)mm

Weight: 10.5kg

Other features: Runco SuperOnyx contrast system; ViViX processing; Runco ConstantContrast system; full colour management and gamma controls; ISF certified; multiple lens options; 230W lamp; 4000-hour lamp life



HCC VERDICT

Runco LightStyle LS-1 → £4,000

Approx → Supplier: www.pulsemarketing.com

→ Tel: 01279 647 039

Highs: Excellent picture quality; plenty of calibration tools for your installer; great value for money

Lows: Slight and rare rainbow effect; not the quietest runner

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



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Proto Finnish

Finlux kicks off its latest attempt to crack the UK market in dramatic style with this ultra-cheap 55in TV. **John Archer** investigates

Bright star:
The 55S6040-M
offers vibrant,
but not too
subtle, colours



Hailing from Finland (as its name suggests) the Finlux brand isn't entirely new to the UK. It's entered and left again on more than one previous occasion. But with its latest push, Finlux (now actually owned by Turkish outfit Vestel) is seemingly making its most concerted effort yet to establish a firm TV foothold on our shores.

Its latest range is extensive and ambitious, a fact well illustrated by the 55S6040-M: a 55in TV that's as far away as you can get from the small 'supermarket shelf-fillers' you might expect the brand to ship.

Less surprising is Finlux's decision to catch punters' eyes by selling its TVs on the cheap. The 55S6040-M's £800 price tag is extraordinarily low, making it a potentially massive bargain for those desperate for some bigscreen action.

It rather looks its money, though, thanks to the hefty width of its bezel and a fairly nondescript design. However, as my aching back confirms, it's sturdily built.

Connectivity doesn't scream 'budget', either. There are four HDMI's – the same amount found on high-end TVs – and two USB ports able to spin files and record from the set's (non-HD) Freeview tuner.

Love Hertz

The 55S6040-M is predictably short of picture adjustments, and its

menus are basic. There is a 100Hz system, though. This can be turned off if you wish, but works surprisingly well, adding clarity to standard-definition fare without making the picture look too processed. I personally wouldn't use it for HD movie viewing, partly because the screen doesn't suffer nearly as much with blurring and resolution loss as other budget LCD TVs.

Another positive surprise is the way the Finlux can combine well-saturated colours with a reasonably convincing black colour, even within a single frame. It's a pleasingly dynamic performance.

The 55S6040-M's most predictable shortcoming is the inconsistency of its backlighting, which finds dark scenes exhibiting patches of extra brightness, especially around the screen's edges. The TV also measures pretty high levels of input lag (making it problematic for console gaming); delivers rather soft-looking SD pictures; fails to produce much colour tone finesse to accompany the vibrancy; and sounds pretty flat and uninspiring.

Yet while the 55S6040-M comes with strings attached it's comfortably better overall than I would have expected for this money – and you can get a model with an HD Freeview tuner for £30 extra. Big screens no longer require big wallets... ●

→ Specifications

3D: NO
Full HD: YES 1,920 x 1,080
Freeview HD: NO Freeview, analogue
Smart TV: NO Not even an Ethernet jack
Connections: 4 x HDMI; 1 x component; 1 x D-Sub PC; 2 x USB ports; digital audio output
Sound: 2 x 12W
Dimensions (off stand): 1,307(w) x 40(d) x 778(h)mm
Weight (off stand): 31.5kg
Features: Edge LED system; 100Hz processing; video/music/photo playback from USB; True Black HDMI mode; SRS Surround; USB PVR functionality

AV/CV

PRODUCT:
Edge LED TV
with SD
Freeview tuner

POSITION:
Near the top
of Finlux's
new range

PEERS:
Sony
KDL-55EX723;
LG 55LW550T

HCC VERDICT

Finlux 55S6040-M → £800 Approx
→ Supplier: www.finluxdirect.com
→ Tel: 0845 4595282

Highs: Large screen for little cash; good connectivity; decent motion handling

Lows: No online capability; lack of colour tone finesse; bland design

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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*'Seduces the listener with realism and a sense of scale...
The Summit X will own your heart from its first notes'*

Ken Kessler, Hi-Fi News (November 2009)

*'Reference-grade performance that you'd struggle to match
at double the price'*

Alan Sircom, Hi-Fi+ (Issue 66)

*'The Summit X is just too addictive to live without. I'm putting
my money where my mouth is and buying the review pair as
my new reference loudspeakers'*

Howard Kneller, SoundStage! (September 2009)

Nothing brings music to life like MartinLogan speakers. Unique technologies, seamlessly fused to create a sound so spacious, so open, it makes ordinary speakers seem hopelessly constrained.

26 years of electrostatic evolution has led to MartinLogan's latest creation: the mighty Summit X. Key to the new speaker's extraordinary performance are its advanced XStat™ electrostatic panel and perfectly integrated Controlled Dispersion Powered Force™ woofer section, effortlessly extending bass response to subterranean depths.

Yet the Summit X never sounds heavy. On the contrary, its performance is extraordinarily fast and open, painting an image that dances boldly before the listener, fully scaled and unconstrained, a sound that's natural, effortless and startlingly real.

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The thin Blu line

Panasonic's DMP-BDT320 Blu-ray player may look more high-street than high-end, but inside, says **Steve May**, it's an AV science project

With its angled edges and slot-loading disc mechanism, the Panasonic DMP-BDT320 at first glance looks like a jazzed up version of the brand's cheaper DMP-BDT220, but the two players are chalk and cheese. This home theatre lightweight puts in a heavyweight performance that belies its thin build.

Indeed, the DMP-BDT320 owes more to the brand's audiophile DMP-BDT500 flagship (reviewed last issue) than its cheaper sibling, sharing core functionality and a similar level of engineering finesse. It doesn't offer the twin HDMI or multichannel analogue outputs of the BDT500, though – and comes

with a touchpad remote control that manages to be even more irritating than the hybrid one supplied with its bigger brother. Navigation is via a series of coded swipes, which you'll need to memorise before you have any chance of controlling your discs. Be prepared to migrate to the brand's control app.

Give us a WAV

As you might expect, the BDT320 offers extensive file playback. The USB media player is happy with FLAC, WAV and MP3 audio tracks, but it shows inexplicable disdain for album art. Video is also widely welcomed, with MKV, AVI, MOV and MP4 all compatible. While this

doesn't extend to playing files from a NAS across a LAN, Panasonic encourages users to manually map remote drives (by inputting their IP address, folder name and login details) directly to the deck in order to render files. As a user-experience this is unapologetically geeky.

Online content is rather more accessible. The brand's Viera Connect portal now represents solid value, with the UK's top three IPTV services (BBC iPlayer, Netflix and YouTube) all onboard.

Blu-ray video delivery is spectacular; discs sparkle with detail, while colours are smooth and nuanced. Episodes from the Season One box-set of *Game of Thrones* in

AV/CV

PRODUCT:

Slimline 3D 'net-connected Blu-ray player

POSITION:

Below Panasonic's flagship DMP-BDT500

PEERS:

Sony BDP-S790; Panasonic DMP-BDT500



The DMP-BDT320 is Panasonic's most stylised player yet

Analysis



GUI: The DMP-BDT320's onscreen menus are smart, hi-res and sensibly structured

Power consumption: Another energy efficient player from Panasonic, using just 8W during movie playback

Killer feature: Panasonic's High Clarity Sound mode lends the DMP-BDT320 a slice of audiophile charm that its mass-market rivals don't offer

Specifications

3D: YES
Upscaling: YES to 1080p
Multiregion: NO Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: YES 1 x HDMI v1.4
Component: NO
Multichannel analogue: NO
Digital audio: YES optical digital audio output
Ethernet: YES
Built in Wi-Fi: YES
SACD/DVD-A: NO/NO
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD decoding: YES/YES
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD bitstream: YES/YES
Dimensions: 430(w) x 27(h) x 185(d)mm
Weight: 1.5kg
Features: USB x2; SD card slot; iOS and Android app control; High Clarity Sound and Tube sound modes; Skype (with optional camera); Viera Connect smart portal, featuring BBC iPlayer, Netflix, YouTube, Dailymotion, Acetrax, Facebook, Twitter and Picasa; DLNA multimedia media playback (AVCHD, MPEG2, DivX, AVI, MKV, MP3, WAV, FLAC, JPEG/MPO)

Remote: Using Panasonic's touchpad requires a bit of practice



particular offer eldritch depth, with grizzled, believable skin tones and finely etched fur.

This fidelity can be tracked back to improvements in Panasonic's High Precision 4:4:4 processor, and something called Adaptive Chroma Processing upsampling. This improves bit depth, giving cinematically smooth gradations and a higher frequency response. Panasonic claims 12-bit precision for the resulting output, to better match today's advanced panel technologies (Blu-ray discs have a native colour depth of just 8-bit).

Of course, it could be argued that all this is all a bit like applying another coat of lacquer to a Steinway. Panasonic's players were always pretty glossy to begin with.

Up for 3D

Performance with 3D is similarly fine. The brand claims to have extracted a smidgeon more clarity from 3D Blu-rays, but this is difficult to verify. Still, 3Dholics will be pleased with the player's ability to convert 2D 'net content into 3D; previously this has been limited to discs.

Perhaps the DMP-BDT320's biggest revelation concerns its sonic performance. While the more

expensive BDT500 claims audio seniority (and is worth upgrading to if you can afford it), this model is defiantly musical. Several tricks have been employed to improve its audio, most effective of which is a High Clarity Sound mode which shuts down the analogue video DAC or the entire HDMI video output (you choose), thereby removing electrical noise on the signal lines between the UniPhier chip and HDMI interface.

Re-enforcing this is a so-called Jitter Purifier. We've seen various techniques used to reduce audio jitter over HDMI, but most require matched players and receivers to work. Here Panasonic has opted to stabilise control signals at the HDMI interface, which it says reduces timing errors regardless of your choice in AVR. Certainly, stereo imaging and soundstage presence are considerable – I settled down with a selection of finely mastered Japanese SHM-CDs, from orchestral classics to Bowie, and was thoroughly engaged.

Overall, the DMP-BDT320 is a beautifully engineered BD player which delivers a stonking performance for the price. But, as with the DMP-BDT500, I'm left wishing it was supplied with a more traditional remote



HCC VERDICT

Panasonic DMP-BDT320 → £270
 Approx → Supplier: www.panasonic.co.uk → Tel: 0844 844 3899

Highs: Outstanding HD video performance; stylish design; FLAC and MKV USB playback

Lows: Unintuitive touchpad remote; challenging media playback across a LAN

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



Living in a box

LG's BH8220B is a cosmetic match to its Cinema 3D TVs – and a definite improvement on their in-built speakers. **Mark Craven** plugs 'n' plays

LG's BH8220B enters the all-in-one system battle arena wearing a silver, boxy design that recalls the DVD-based systems of yesteryear. It's as if someone at the Korean firm's design lab handed in the wrong piece of paper. That said, at least it's a tonal match for the brand's current range of super-stylish flatscreen TVs, and the brushed aluminium finish, particular on the side-firing subwoofer, is pleasing on the eye.

AV/CV

PRODUCT:
5.1-channel
all-in-one
system

POSITION:
One of eight in
LG's range

PEERS:
Panasonic
SC-BTT590;
Samsung
HT-E6750W

Potential buyers will need to arm themselves with £650 – not an inconsiderable amount in these days of £100 Blu-ray players and £500 42in TVs. Lucky, then, that as well as providing surround sound sonic thrills, the BH8220B will also spin your 3D Blu-rays, play footsie with your networked devices, usher you into LG's online Smart TV portal and plenty more besides. This explains why the full manual comes on a disc – it'd be a hefty tome in print.

Initial setup is par for the home cinema system course. Colour-coded speaker cables? Check. Oodles of polystyrene packaging? Ditto. Supplied HDMI cable? Er, no actually. Maybe it was just my sample. This lack of a digital umbilical isn't a problem in my house, but could bemuse other consumers.

Going for a drive

The five satellites are weighty and larger than you might expect. Each

Each of the satellites employs three drivers – two mids and a tweeter



Remote:
Very easy to use, and styled to match



features three drivers – two newly-designed aramid fibre cone midrange units and a tweeter. The centre unit has a small plinth protruding from its base to aid installation.

The main unit/BD deck feels equally well built, with the disc tray and USB/3.5mm jacks sitting behind a front panel. The rim of the central volume control glows bright white when the system is on – and I couldn't find a way to switch this off. Rear panel connections include optical audio in, an Ethernet port (there's built in Wi-Fi, too) and 2-in, 1-out HDMI. The output supports ARC.

Metal mayhem

Video playback is of high quality. *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (BD) is packed with sharp edges and intricate details, and the LG deck doesn't falter in teasing them out. Partnered with my 42in Philips screen, it proved to be an enjoyable HD experience – Chapter 9 of

Michael Bay's sequel opens in a desert at sunset. The plumes of dust spat up by a convoy of cars drift fluidly across the screen, and when two of the battle-bots start having a chin-wag their glinting bodywork is quite exquisite. 3D Blu-rays, meanwhile, retain all these good points, and there's depth-a-plenty (nor did the LG deck have any problem syncing with my 3D display). DVDs output at 1080p enjoy a gentle sharpening, but nothing that's going to make me stop buying BDs instead.

Sonically, LG's system is impressive, with a weighty, full-bodied sound that no doubt owes thanks to the larger-than-usual satellites. The centre speaker, in particular, stamps its authority on proceedings, making sure that dialogue is upfront and not overrun by the rest of the surround mix. Likewise, the subwoofer is no slouch, and laps up the frequent, foreboding LFE in *Transformers...* with relish. It does, however, tend towards an omnipotent rumble, rather than a tight, taut performance.

The identical front and back speakers track panning effects across the 5.1 soundfield with no irritating tonal change, and deliver the orchestral score with a decent, room-filling swell. In fact, the BH8220B can easily go loud enough for the kind of space it's likely to be installed in.

My main criticism concerns the LG's reproduction of higher frequencies – this system never really sings, preferring to focus on the midrange. This is something I found particularly obvious with music – Megadeth's *Rust in Peace* (CD) lacked the dynamism I know is in there. Movie soundtracks don't sound as expansive as perhaps they could, either.

Compelling proposition

Yet while there are the inevitable flaws with its sonic performance that audiophiles will pick on, the BH8220B is a compelling proposition for anyone new to the home cinema game. It's well-built, well specified and furnished with a intuitive hi-res GUI that makes operation a pleasure. Blu-ray performance is excellent and the speakers offer a surround sound experience far in advance of anything you'll find in a soundbar or TV speakers. It could easily become the Smart centre of your living room. And you might even like the slightly retro design...

→Analysis



GUI: The BH8220B's menus are all hi-res and very responsive, but somewhat static in presentation – Smart, but not Albert Einstein

Killer feature: It's the LG's ability to muster up impressive volume levels and scale that really stands out – as well as its excellent BD playback

→Specifications

3D: YES

Upscaling: YES to 1080p

Connections: HDMI v1.4 output; 2 x HDMI inputs; optical digital audio input; analogue stereo input; Ethernet port; USB port; FM aerial input; 3.5mm input

SACD/DVD-A playback: NO/NO

DTS-HD/Dolby TrueHD decoding: YES/YES

Claimed power output: 1,100W

Dimensions (main unit): 430(w) x 61.5(h) x 312(d)mm

Weight (main unit): 3.5kg

Features: 3D Surround Processor; LG Smart TV; Smart Share; built-in Wi-Fi; Wi-Fi direct; DLNA certified; Bluetooth streaming; external HDD playback; LG remote for Android and iPad/iPhone; four-band equaliser; FM tuner; DivX, AVCHD, WMV, MKV, FLAC, WMA file playback



HCC VERDICT

LG BH8220B → £650 Approx
→ Supplier: www.lg.com/uk
→ Tel: 0844 847 5454

Highs: Blu-ray playback; largescale audio performance; solid construction; full of features

Lows: High-frequencies could be sweeter; sub could be tighter

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Fighting the light

Panasonic's latest projector wants you to use it with the lights on, forcing **John Archer** to open his curtains for a change



Bright star:
The AH1000E is designed to blend into your living room

For most people, the fact that projectors usually require near darkness to work well makes them a non-starter for a normal family living environment. This is why Panasonic has rustled up the PT-AH1000E: a PJ designed to deliver bigscreen party thrills in light rooms.

The main trick the AH1000E employs to make this social projection dream a reality is an extreme brightness output. Its 280W lamp churns out a remarkable 2,800 Lumens – that ought to be enough to cut through the midday sun while you're watching the Olympics.

Crucially, though, the AH1000E doesn't solely rely on its potent lamp for its party projection kudos. It's easy to use, too, with setup aided by an expansive optical zoom and a superbly simple joystick system for shifting the image up, down, left or right. It's a PJ for dummies.

Also key is something called Light Harmonizer 3, which uses integrated sensors to analyse the brightness and colour tone of the light in your room, and adjusts the picture settings accordingly. It sounds gimmicky, but unlike the light meters built into many TVs, it works very well, making on-the-fly tweaks that massively improve the image in all sorts of different situations.

In fact, the Light Harmoniser feature single-handedly makes the

AH1000E arguably the most persuasive and user-friendly 'casual' projector I've tested.

Light fantastic

In use, the AH1000E proves supremely able to combat a startling amount of ambient brightness. Even with my test room dimmer bulbs on full the images produced from the Blu-rays of *War Horse* and *Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol* still looked passably punchy and, most startlingly of all, naturally coloured. Usually, even if an affordable projector has the brightness to tackle ambient light it fails to provide any colour compensation, leaving tones muted and unnatural. But the AH1000E's Light Harmoniser helps it sidestep this common flaw.

In short, the AH1000E meets its remit very well, and outgun the more expensive Runco LS-HB. However, it can't quite get serious enough for the 'curtains drawn' proper film-viewing sessions you're likely to indulge in from time to time. Even if you set the lamp to Eco level (something the Light Harmoniser can't do automatically), black levels during dark scenes still fail to look entirely convincing, with a noticeable grey mist over the darkest areas and a shortage of shadow detail.

So, consider this a cautious recommendation ■

→ Specifications

3D: NO
Full HD: YES 1,920 x 1,080 resolution
Component video: YES 1 input
HDMI: YES 2 x v1.3
12V trigger: YES 2
Brightness: 2800 ANSI Lumens
Contrast ratio: 50,000:1
Dimensions: 470(w) x 151(h) x 380(d)mm
Weight: 8.6kg
Other features: Light Harmoniser 3; vertical and horizontal image shift via joystick; eco and normal lamp modes; dynamic contrast system; Motion Effect processing; seven picture presets; Pure Colour Filter Pro technology; 29dB fan noise; 3,000-hour lamp life

AV/CV

PRODUCT:
Affordable high-brightness Full HD projector

POSITION:
Panasonic's cheapest home cinema PJ – though it only has two models in the range!

PEERS:
SIM2 Crystal 35; Runco LS-HB

HCC VERDICT

Panasonic PT-AH1000E → £1,600
 Approx → Supplier: www.panasonic.co.uk → Tel: 0844 844 3899

Highs: Very bright pictures watchable in ambient light; doddle to setup; Light Harmoniser feature

Lows: Can't deliver a convincing black colour; Light Harmoniser can't engage Eco mode; noisy runner

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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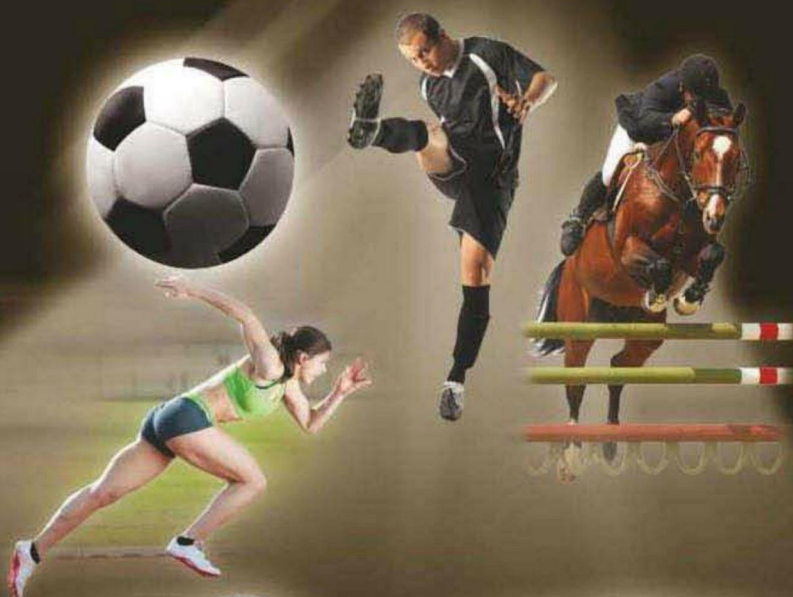


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HCC Issue 206



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When trends collide

Can't decide between conventional 2.1 system or a funky sound bar? Thanks to Samsung you can have both. **Steve May** listens in



Two become one: The left/right speakers lock together to form a soundbar

It was probably inevitable that the increasingly popular single-piece soundbar and the booming 2.1 audio market would collide. The result is a hybrid audio solution built around soundbars that can transform, Autobot-style, into traditional left/right loudspeakers.

The Samsung Crystal Surround Air Track HW-E551 is one example (Panasonic has another in its own home theatre range), built around a two-piece soundbar that can be locked together (using neat brackets and horizontal stand) to function as a single 104cm enclosure, or snapped in half, creating L/R pole speakers.

Providing bass whatever iteration you choose is a wireless subwoofer. Well, it's not strictly wireless as it needs a power supply, but decoded audio is delivered from this to the soundbar via the 5.2/5.8GHz band. Samsung claims it will work up to a distance of nine metres – although if your viewing room is that large, you really should be looking at bigger speakers...

The subwoofer also functions as an HDMI switcher, with two inputs and one output. One input supports ARC (Audio Return Channel), so live TV audio can be routed into the

system without additional cabling. Other connections include digital optical audio and a USB port. The latter allows MP3 and WMA music files to be played, although logistically how suitable a subwoofer is to thumbdrive action remains to be seen – you'll regret it if you place this somewhere out of the way, particularly as the USB port is located round the back.

Helpfully, the sub shuts down after 20 minutes of inactivity. The system also supports Bluetooth audio streaming, so you can pair a mobile for simplified playback of your music collection.

The HW-E551 looks swish, but the finish is deceptive. What appears to be aluminium is in fact lightweight plastic. Still, it makes for an entertaining listen, offering a sharp mid-range and thuddy bass. Indeed, the slam produced by HW-E551's subwoofer is surprisingly potent. It doesn't reach down particularly deep, but concentrates its energy just below the belt.

The system proves fine for regular action/adventure fare (Disney's 'toon *Bolt* enjoys clean stereophony and a plump bass), but it can get a little congested with more complex content – I found it staggered under the weight of Tomoyasu Hotei's live rendition of *Battle Without Honor or Humanity* (Blu-ray). In terms of reach, the system comes to life at a relatively high 50Hz (although the sub does make farty noises at 31Hz). At around 10kHz there's some extraneous noises which compromise fine detail.

Genuine wallop

Overall, the HW-E551 can be considered a versatile upgrade for a flatscreen TV. It offers genuine wallop and looks splendid in either its stereo or soundbar configuration. A home theatre or audiophile solution it may not be, but for 400 notes it's certainly fair value – I suspect people staying in your guest bedroom will love it.

→ Specifications

HDMI: yes 2 x in, 1 x out

Stereo phono audio: NO

Digital audio: YES one digital optical input

Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD decoding: YES/YES

Total Amplification (claimed): 2 x

80W (left/right), 150W subwoofer

Features: Bluetooth audio streaming; Music, Drama, Cinema, News, Sports, Game and 3D Sound DSP post-processing modes; wireless speaker connection; MP3 and WMA file playback from USB

AV/CV

PRODUCT: Hybrid soundbar/2.1 home entertainment system

POSITION: Flagship 2.1 audio solution in Samsung's home theatre range

PEERS: Panasonic SC-HTB550; Boston Acoustics TVue Model 30

HCC VERDICT

Samsung Crystal Surround Air Track HW-E551 → £400 Approx
→ Supplier: www.samsung.co.uk
→ Tel: 0330 7267864

Highs: Contemporary design; versatile 'transformer' soundbar; slamming subwoofer

Lows: Bass doesn't go deep; upper registers not too clean; ineffective '3D Sound' mode

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Going to the next level

There's a revolution happening in HDMI distribution, says **Steve May**

If you want to pipe Full HD around your home, the pro way of doing it has been via HDMI over Ethernet, utilising paired network cables book-ended by an HDMI transmitter and receiver. But now a new, more versatile standard is finding its feet. Known as HDBaseT, it allows a single Ethernet cable (Cat5e upwards) to carry lossless HD video and audio, plus 100BT internet and control, over 100m without any signal problems.

The system here comprises everything you need, including a full complement of cables. The main unit features four HDMI inputs and four Ethernet outputs. These each terminate at a small HDMI receiver. Just connect your HD sources to view them on any of the four output feeds. With support coming from some of the consumer electronics majors, you can expect to see compliant Ethernet jacks popping up on everything from TVs to Blu-ray players.



Pros

- Simple to install. IR repeaters for each source allow remote control of any transmitting device from the remote receiver.
- This distribution club isn't exclusive. The matrix can connect to a router, using additional Ethernet jacks on the hub, thereby injecting network and internet connectivity.
- HDMI delivery is completely transparent, which means no artefacting. Lossless audio is also delivered intact.

Next-gen: HDBaseT is a new, versatile HDMI distribution standard

Cons

- Simple domestic setups might be better served by a wireless HDMI TX/RX system.
- The hardware is clearly intended for a boot room, given the industrial-style display.

HCC VERDICT

HDanywhere 4x4 Multiroom+
£1,500 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

EMINENT EM7285 → £165 Approx → www.eminent-online.com

High-speed media player

Steve May reckons this net-connected device means business

It may not be pretty, but Eminent's EM7285 network media player is certainly advanced. Built around the Realtek RT1185 chipset, it's compatible with a huge array of files and formats. The player ships sans hard drive, but one is easily loaded into the side if you want to store content locally; large files can be quickly moved onto it via a high-speed USB 3.0

connection. Rear-facing connections include HDMI and component with digital optical and coaxial audio



outputs. There are also legacy phono if you want to slum it. Gigabit Ethernet is the recommended network connection but there's also integrated Wi-Fi.

The UI offers themed library access to movies, music and images on the HDD or across a LAN. Alternatively you can scour YouTube, watch 'net TV or listen to online radio. The UI is also where you can browse your network for connected devices or rummage around the hard drive. Also onboard is the BitTorrent downloader, Transmission.

Pros

- MKV, AVCHD, H.264, DivX, XviD, MPEG-1 and MPEG-2 – you name it, this non-judgemental box will play it. It'll also embrace Blu-ray

and DVD ISOs (with support for Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA).

- The EM725 doubles as a Smart Hub of sorts. One innovative idea is the user-generated Apps Centre. This allows you to customise your player with apps made by other users (currently the most popular appears to be a porn viewer...).

Cons

- The rudimentary UI makes navigating content a bit of a trial. The thumbnail folder view doesn't display the full title name of a file – frustrating, particularly if you're trying to find a single episode in a complete TV season.

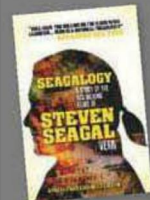
HCC VERDICT

Eminent EM7285
£165 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

In Brief

Seagology:
A Study of the
Ass-Kicking Films
of Steven Seagal
Vern
£11 Approx



This exploration of the career of Steven Seagal returns in a newly updated form. The book now takes in the likes of his reality TV show *Steven Seagal: Lawman* and his role in Robert Rodriguez's *Machete*, and Vern's prose is as witty and affectionate as ever. Quite simply brilliant

1 2 3 4 5

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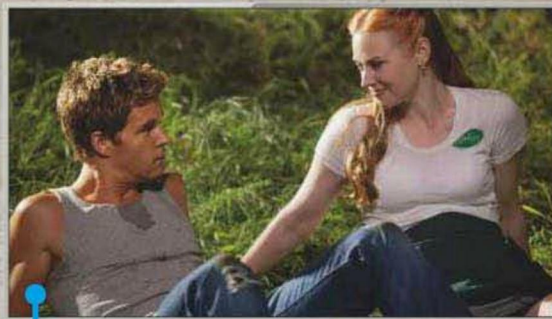
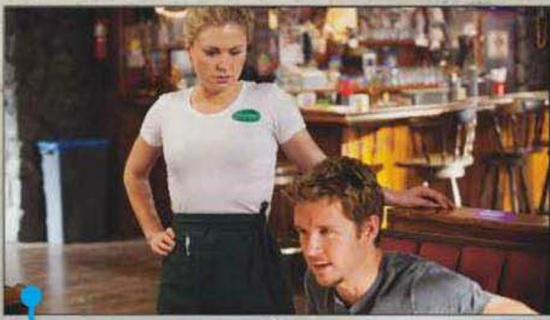
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46/47in LED TV shootout

Adrian Justins puts a quartet of style-conscious LED TVs through their paces to see which one he wants hanging on his wall



LG 47LM670

£1,500 Approx

The only Passive 3D screen in our group test, LG's model uses a Magic Motion remote for improved navigation of its Smart TV portal

SAMSUNG UE46ES7000

£1,700 Approx

Less stylish to look at than the ES8000 models, but almost as well-specified, this 46in Active 3DTV offers both Freesat and Freeview

PANASONIC TX-L47DT50

£2,000 Approx

The most expensive model in our roundup, Panasonic's LED TV sports an ultra-slim bezel and plenty of calibration options

TOSHIBA 46YL863

£1,000 Approx

Toshiba's 46in screen will be hoping to entice buyers with its eye-catching price tag and CEVO Engine-powered processing

Fun on demand

An awesome Smart TV experience complements accomplished HD pics



You would be forgiven for being seduced by the 47LM670's delightful floating ribbon stand and gorgeous slip of a bezel that virtually disappears when the screen is switched on. But at the same time you may be wondering if the 47LM670 is all fur coat and no knickers. After all, its picture processing is perfunctory and the screen uses Passive 3D technology. Sometimes, though, it pays to keep things simple, and whilst the 47LM670 is not an unqualified triumph it does succeed in delivering better than expected results.

A nicely designed remote control combines with a slick, contemporary-looking operating system to make the screen a pleasure to use, particularly the Quick Menu that summons up a colourful dashboard of widgets along the bottom. LG's Smart TV portal is chockablock with video-on-demand apps and there's a secondary 'Magic Wand' remote with a pointer that makes surfing the web less laborious than with a traditional handset.

The screen uses local dimming to control its rather uneven edge-lit LED

lighting. Like the UK's springtime weather, it's clouds that are the 47LM670's problem. Happily, most of the time you won't notice them, but dark sequences such as *Mad Men*'s end credits give the light pooling game away.

You can adjust the LED backlighting and dynamic contrast. Simply switching the black level to low gives discernibly better results in terms of contrast. Colour reproduction is rarely a problem on LED TVs and I found the 47LM670's palette accurate and enjoyable, particularly in the faithful nature of skin tones regardless of the source. For a more demanding experience, the screen gives you access to its gamma setting, plus there are EBU and SMPTE colour gamut standards.

Standard-definition channels are hard to recommend at the best of times but the 47LM670's built-in tuner yields better than average Freeview images.

Motion carried

There might not be any high-frequency image refreshing on offer but moving images do not trip up the

Out of the shadows:

Poor shadow detail is the only blot on the 47LM670's page

47LM670 in the same way as they do some other large TVs. Of course, the motion resolution drops so that a large amorphous area such as a football pitch sometimes looks a bit mushy, and a fast-moving ball or F1 car will look blurry, but there is none of the jarring jerkiness that many basic LCD screens exhibit.

Things are just as satisfying with Blu-ray playback, where my test platter, *No Country For Old Men*, is displayed with no more than a hint of judder. Other attributes on the money include minimal MPEG noise, excellent colours and rock-solid black levels. What is the screen's most annoying weakness, however, is a lack of shadow detail that can only be overcome by cranking up the brightness and diluting the black until it starts to grey out.

As far as 3D goes, stick to Blu-ray rather than Sky and you'll enjoy fairly decent, flicker-free pics of an acceptable resolution (this is a Passive display, remember, so you lose detail horizontally). The ultra-light specs are both comfy and affordable – and you even get five pairs included with the set.

Premium performer

Panasonic's 47in LED is good-looking and adept with HD – but costly



Picture perfect:

The TX-L47DT50 is a knockout with quality 2D and 3D sources

There's something a bit 'last year' about the style of the TX-L47DT50 – but that's no bad thing as Panasonic has shrewdly adopted a look that's proved successful for Samsung in the recent past. In fact, this is one of the best-looking TVs in Panasonic's 2012 lineup, which has more models than Paris in Fashion Week – and the TX-L47DT50's picture quality proves that beauty is more than just skin deep...

Combined with a decent remote control, the set is easy to get to grips with, and the utilitarian Freeview and

to comprehensive multimedia, networking and online features. These even include ultra-rare FLAC file playback, a web browser and embedded Twitter and Facebook interaction whilst watching TV. Delving into content is a bit of a slow process, though.

Standard viewing modes comprise Dynamic, Normal, Cinema and the adjustment-free True Cinema. Beyond this are two Professional modes for ISF calibration and myriad image adjustment tools. These include full colour management and Panasonic's judder-reducing Intelligent Field Creation (IFC), which is confusingly called 24p Smooth Film mode when displaying a native 1920 x 1080 Blu-ray image. Impressively, judder is not one of the TX-L47DT50's problems and IFC can simply be left off or else just choose the lowest setting without fear of too many side-effects.

There Will Be Blood on BD is a tough visual challenge, which the TX-L47DT50 does an accomplished job of meeting, taking low-light scenes in its stride and serving up

excellent levels of clarity, contrast and shadow detail. MPEG noise on *No Country For Old Men*'s vast desert skies is only marginally distracting and colours are unerringly natural.

Really dark scenes are slightly marred by LED backlight clouding but the problem is less so than on other current Panasonic LCDs. Generally, all HD sources look great. Live football and cricket on Sky are plum in terms of clarity and colours and the screen's stereoscopic viewing is superb. Crosstalk is virtually non-existent and almost negates the palaver of Active 3D (3D specs aren't supplied with the TV and they cost up to £80 a pair).

The TX-L47DT50 is highly capable with upscaled standard-definition DVDs, the classic 1970s' *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* looking (if not sounding) quite splendid, despite the murky lighting. There are, however, problems with SD Freeview. Simultaneous broadcasts on Sky have greater detail and the difference is exacerbated with lower bit-rate channels. A Europa League match on Five was barely watchable (whilst the HD transmission was flawless). ➤

'The screen's stereoscopic performance is superb. Crosstalk proved to be virtually non-existent'

Freesat EPGs can be passed over in favour of the slicker ROVI guide if an online connection is in place.

The screen doesn't just look smart, it acts it too, with the Viera Tools button on the handset providing access via a dashboard

Cutting-edge king

Samsung's UE46ES7000 shows just how good edge-lit LED can be



This attractive beast is rammed with cutting-edge technology – including four remote controls if you count your mouth and arms as two of them. Gesture and voice control can make you feel self-conscious and possibly embarrassed as you gesticulate and yell basic commands at the TV. Frankly, it's a pointless gimmick.

But there's a lot else to admire about the UE46ES7000, including its attractive design, sleek operating system and networking skills (although BBC iPlayer is a curious absentee from the TV's Smart TV portal). More important, though, are the first-rate images the screen is capable of serving up. Freeview is not its forte (standard-def images are a tad soft) but overall, there are very few negatives to spoil the show. When it comes to the issue of light leakage, the backlight is exceptionally well contained and off-axis viewing holds up with negligible loss of contrast and colour even at extreme angles.

The UE46ES7000 is made for Blu-rays. Still image detail and clarity are sensational, revealing, for

example, every nuance of Sully's facial features in *Avatar* on Blu-ray. Meanwhile, *No Country For Old Men*'s notoriously tricky camera pans when Josh Brolin's character approaches the remains of the shoot-out are perfectly executed when MotionPlus is set to its lowest setting, with no jerkiness and no artefacts such as haloing. Even with MotionPlus set to off, judder is so minimal as to be insignificant.

High brightness and luxuriant black levels ensure that images are punchy, and this is achieved without compromising shadow detail. MPEG noise is effortlessly suppressed, too

'The UE46ES7000 is made for your Blu-rays. Still image detail and clarity are sensational'

– *No Country For Old Men*'s vast cloudy skies are solidly displayed without pixellating. Accurate colours, including natural skin tones, are the icing on what is a very tasty slice of HD cake.

MotionPlus comes of age:

No judder, no artefacts, no complaints

Standard-def DVDs are nicely upscaled in most respects, although *The Long Good Friday* on DVD is a bit on the soft side and MotionPlus artefacts are more prevalent than with 1080p24 material.

Sport in HD is displayed with minimal judder and although resolution drops off when cameras pan quickly it's not as noticeable as with other screens. It's also a relief to report that the UE46ES7000 I reviewed was not subjected to the occasional jerky frame which I found on a UE46ES8000 (and is possibly a firmware problem that Samsung should be addressing).

Picture tools are bountiful in terms of options – gamma, white balance, expert pattern and flesh tone adjustment to name but a few.

The UE46ES7000's 3D experience is a mixed bag. The specs are light and comfy, depth and perspective are great but the level of crosstalk present is annoying. You can tweak perspective and depth settings (ignore the ineffective 3D Optimisation setting) to reduce it, but it seems more prevalent than on previous years' models. ➤

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Smooth operator

Toshiba's 46YL863 focuses on the basics and gets most of them just right



The 46YL863 is a fine-looking TV, although its heavy-duty stand lacks the coolness of the gorgeous brushed aluminium bezel and designer remote control. It is not, however, a TV for the impatient, taking a good 30 seconds for the blank screen to spring to life after pressing the on button. The interminable wait is possibly the most frustrating aspect of owning this screen as it otherwise generally acquits itself well and shows the importance of Toshiba's CEVO engine and Active Vision M800HD processing when it comes to delivering HD images.

It helps that light leakage from the 46YL863's hybrid back and edge-lit LED panel is negligible whilst local dimming is well-executed. Strong black levels are not achieved at the expense of shadow detail. There are numerous enthusiast level controls in the Expert sub-menu (including a test pattern, white balance, RGB filters and colour decoding options) but once Auto Brightness is disengaged (it darkens the screen terribly) it's simply a case of choosing the most suitable preset viewing

mode. Ignore Hollywood Pro unless you have a TPA-1 colour analyser and want access to the Colour Calibration menu.

Digging out the detail

Compared with an HDMI feed of BBC News on Sky there is a sliver more detail in the TV's own Freeview tuner. Otherwise, watching standard-definition has little to recommend it, as anything with movement can become a mush fest or fleetingly reveal hatched lines.

More positively, the 46YL863 is reassuringly adept with HD, so that image adjustment is more a case of personal taste rather than absolute necessity. Snooker on BBC HD looks immaculate. Static images are sensationally crisp and punchy. Fast-moving sports on Sky HD show that the screen loses resolution as pock-marked football pitches become less decipherable but there is no jarring caused by camera pans. Engaging Active Vision's standard setting does a nice job of smoothing the action without introducing unwanted artefacts. Colour fidelity and contrast hold up nicely.

Slow starter: Energy-saving means the 46YL863 takes an age to power up

It's a similar story with Blu-rays. The 46YL863 passes the *No Country For Old Men* motion test with flying colours. Josh Brolin's exploration in the desert is just a tad jerky but is more than acceptable and there is no haloing or loss of filmic character. Again, colours and detail are excellent, but that old Toshiba problem of MPEG noise with large monochrome patches (such as the clouds of the vast desert skies) is sadly prevalent. Despite being an IPS LCD panel, off-axis viewing suffers with a loss of contrast and there is bad news for 3D fans, with crosstalk treading into almost double vision proportions.

The 46YL863's media player notably has the clearest layout around, with full file description, but it refused to recognise some of my usually reliable .MPG and .M4V files. And, while Toshiba's online Places portal scores top marks for its easy-on-the-eye and simple to navigate layout, it seriously needs a boost content-wise in the video- and audio-on-demand sections.

That said, this is an appetising screen considering its price point.

Final standings

Ranking this quartet was not a hard decision, with the Samsung UE46ES7000 taking first prize at a canter. Features-wise, there is little to choose between it and the Panasonic TX-L47DT50, both have dual Freeview and Freesat HD tuners and, aside from the absence of the iPlayer on its Smart TV portal, the UE46ES7000 has the advantage by including 3D specs but costing several hundred pounds less.

In terms of performance the UE46ES7000 is the only screen here that delivers consistently good pictures

regardless of the source (I'm ignoring the slightly soft Freeview SD images). With HD material the UE46ES7000 is unmatched in so many aspects including clarity, contrast, shadow detail, viewing angle, motion resolution and noise reduction.

Panasonic's TX-L47DT50 is certainly a fine TV, but compared with both South Korean models here its operating system feels tired and uninspiring. The Smart TV portal is more contemporary-looking than its main menu system but is hampered by slow navigation and, overall, the set's high price counts against it.

LG's 47LM670 just edges past the Toshiba into third place. It has a sensational design, is a pleasure to use and serves up some superbly detailed pictures. But the family-friendly, low-res 3D pics may be a compromise too far for some and a lack of shadow detail blights the score sheet.

The wooden spoon goes to Toshiba's 46YL863. In isolation, it stands up well as a very decent £1,000 screen but there are foibles such as excessive MPEG noise, 3D crosstalk and an excessively lengthy power-up time that can be avoided if you increase your budget ●

1ST



HCC VERDICT

Samsung UE46ES7000
→ £1,700 Approx → Supplier:
www.samsung.co.uk
→ Tel: 0330 7267864

Highs: Impeccable HD images;
attractive menu system
Lows: 3D X-talk poor; soft SD
Freeview; no BBC iPlayer

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

3D: yes Active shutter
Full HD: yes 1,920 x 1,080
Tuner: yes Freeview HD, Freesat
HD, CI slot
Connections: 3 x HDMI; 3 x USB;
Ethernet; component;
composite; optical digital audio
out; D-Sub PC in; Scart
Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness: N/A
Contrast ratio: N/A
Dimensions (off stand): 1,039(w) x
615(h) x 31(d)mm
Weight (off stand): 12kg
Features: USB multimedia
playback; 800CMR processing
engine; Smart Hub; web
browser; Dolby Digital Plus;
Dolby Pulse; digital noise filter;
ultra clear panel; arch flow
stand; super narrow bezel;
Allshare (DLNA) connection;
Anynet+ (HDMI-CEC); picture-
in-picture; USB PVR-ready;
USB multimedia playback; 2 x
3D active glasses included;
voice and gesture control

2ND



HCC VERDICT

Panasonic TX-L47DT50
→ £2,000 Approx → Supplier:
www.panasonic.co.uk
→ Tel: 08705 357357

Highs: Near flawless HD
pictures; feature-packed; user-
friendly; attractive design
Lows: Outdated UI; pricey

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

3D: yes Active shutter
Full HD: yes 1,920 x 1,080
Tuner: yes Freeview HD, Freesat
HD, CI slot
Connections: 4 x HDMI; 3 x USB;
Ethernet; SD card slot;
component; composite; optical
digital audio out; D-Sub PC in;
Scart
Sound: 18W (2 x 4W + 10W
woofer)
Brightness: N/A
Contrast ratio: N/A
Dimensions (off stand): 1,067 x 631
x 27 mm 1067(w) x 631(h) x
27(d)mm
Weight (off stand): 13kg
Features: Built-in wi-fi; USB
multimedia playback; SD card
multimedia playback; 178°
viewing angle; Brilliant Contrast
Clear Panel Pro; 1600Hz
backlight scanning; Smart
Viera Engine Pro; V-Audio
ProSurround 2.1; Dolby Digital
Plus/DolbyPulse/DTS 2.0+
Digital out; DLNA; USB HDD
recording; SD card/USB media
player; Viera Connect Smart TV

3RD



HCC VERDICT

LG 47LM670 → £1,500 Approx
→ Supplier: www.lge.co.uk
→ Tel: 0870 6075544

Highs: Gorgeous design; slick
OS; solid, judder-free images
Lows: Lack of shadow detail;
some backlight leakage; poor
motion resolution

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

3D: yes Passive
Full HD: yes 1,920 x 1,080
Tuner: yes Freeview HD, CI slot
Connections: 3 x HDMI; 3 x USB;
Ethernet; component;
composite; optical digital audio
out; D-Sub PC in; Scart
Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness: N/A
Contrast ratio: N/A
Dimensions (off stand): 1,063(w) x
628(h) x 33(d)mm
Weight (off stand): 15kg
Features: Wi-Fi built-in including
WiDi; dual-screen gaming
mode; Triple XD Engine; 7
modes (Intelligent sensor, Vivid,
Standard, Cinema, Game, isf
Expert1, isf Expert2); PVR
Record (to external USB
storage device); DLNA Smart
Share; Dolby Digital Decoder;
Infinite Surround; Clear Voice;
e-Manual; 2D-3D conversion;
AN-MR300 magic remote
control; Skype compatible;
Smart Energy Saving; Smart
TV portal

4TH



HCC VERDICT

Toshiba 46YL863 → £1,000
Approx → Supplier: www.
toshiba.co.uk
→ Tel: 08704 424424

Highs: Adept at handling HD;
needs little adjustment
Lows: Slow in use; excessive
MPEG noise on Blu-rays

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

3D: yes Active shutter
Full HD: yes 1,920 x 1,080
Tuner: yes Freeview HD, CI slot
Connections: 4 x HDMI; 2 x USB;
Ethernet; component;
composite; optical digital audio
out; D-Sub PC in; Scart
Sound: 2 x 10W, plus 10W sub
Brightness: 450 cd/m2
Contrast ratio: 7,000,000:1
Dimensions (off stand): 1,067(w) x
654(h) x 29(d)mm
Weight (off stand): 12kg
Features: Network Resolution+;
3D Resolution+; Standard/
Smooth 24p Mode; MPEG NR;
Digital NR; Auto Backlight
Control; Ambient Light Sensor;
3D colour management; Exact
Scan mode; Hollywood Mode 1
& 2 (Day/Night Mode);
greyscale settings; gamma;
RGB Filter; integrated test
pattern; Audyssey EQ; Dolby
Digital Plus; Dolby Volume;
SoundNavi; PVR Record (to
external USB storage device);
Wireless (built-in); DLNA;
Toshiba Media Controller
compatible; Toshiba Places

Finishing touches

Adrian Justins trawls the shelves for those must-have home cinema extras

IMAGINE ACOUSTICS SOUNDSCENE MODEL 1

£1,300 approx



The Soundscene Model 1 hides behind a picture, making it the world's first hang-on-the-wall Apple AirPlay speaker. And unlike other

wall-art speakers, it doesn't just look like a picture, it actually is a picture, albeit one with side-firing stereo speakers slotted in to the 46mm gap between the front and the wall.

Distributed by Armour Home, the system has four low-profile and ultra-wide dispersion BMR (balanced mode radiator) drive units. Each driver claims a frequency response of 50Hz-20KHz with digital equalisation, and is powered by a dedicated 12.5W RMS amplifier (which means mains electricity is required).

The Soundscene can be used on its own or combined with other AirPlay products to create a multiroom system. Maximum dimensions are 595mm x 515mm; each is custom-built to your requirements and can be used as a mirror or as a picture frame. It can also be supplied 'naked' without a frame or art for £1,100.

www.imagineacoustics.co.uk

HCC VERDICT

Time to rip up some wallpaper!



ARCAM RLINK DAC

£150 approx

Arcam's latest Digital to Analogue Converter (DAC) acts as a bridge between your digital devices and legacy analogue gear, and aims to buff up the sonics along the way.

While you can spend a small fortune on a DAC, the affordable rLink is a plug and play option. Socketry comprises coaxial and optical digital audio inputs and analogue stereo phono outputs. Under the black cast-aluminium lid is a Texas

Instruments PCM5102 24-bit DAC compatible with sample rates up to 192kHz.

The dinky rLink (it measures just 75(w) x 100(d) x 26(h)mm) can be used with any source that has an optical output, including TVs, Freeview, Sky and Virgin Media set-top boxes, as well as CD players.

www.arcam.co.uk

HCC VERDICT

Audio upgrade in your pocket



SAGE AV SPEAKER STANDS

From £110 approx

From the number of modern apartments that feature in consumer electronics publicity photos you'd be forgiven for thinking that AV kit wasn't aimed at people who live in more traditional surroundings. Redressing the balance somewhat is Sage AV, a new UK business whose range of hi-fi racks and stands is designed for enthusiasts who live in period homes.

Taking inspiration from the wrought iron work frequently seen in country cottages, Sage AV's new products feature basket weave and spiral steel

bars as part of their construction. The speaker stands are available in 30cm and 50cm heights and come with a choice of twist or weave finish on their solid steel uprights. The heavy-gauge steel bottom plate is fitted with adjustable spikes and the top plate can be supplied with or without top spikes.

The company also makes equipment racks and offers a bespoke design service. www.sageaudiovisual.com

HCC VERDICT

Design with a twist

SYNOLOGY DISKSTATION DS112J

£130 approx

While NAS drives are not generally the most eco-friendly of home entertainment gear, Synology has taken up the tree-hugging baton with the DiskStation DS112j. As well as sporting a newly designed enclosure that allows air to flow round the drive and make it quieter and cooler, this is the company's most energy-efficient DiskStation ever, consuming only 12.1W of juice in operation, and dropping to 4.4W in hibernation mode.

Equipped with a 1.0GHz CPU, 128MB RAM, one Gigabit LAN port and two USB 2.0 ports, the DS112j can accommodate up to 4TB of storage. Like other Synology DiskStations, the DS112j is powered by DiskStation Manager 4.0, which provides features to boost productivity and simplify tasks.

www.synology.com

HCC VERDICT

A decent everyday NAS drive



PLANTRONICS BACKBEAT GO

£70 approx

Wireless headphones have yet to really take off, especially earbud-style designs, but Plantronics thinks its latest cordless cans have got what it takes to entice smartphone users on the go. Weighing just 13g, the company reckons these are the smallest and lightest wireless earbud-style headphones on the market.

Designed for use with phones, tablets and MP3 players, the BackBeat GO has noise-reduction technology and inline controls that allow users to take calls, skip tracks and adjust volume. Other features include up to 4.5 hours usage time, handy 2-in-1 USB charging cable and A2DP Bluetooth audio streaming. A headset battery meter for Android or iPhone users displays the charge left on the headphones at a glance.

www.plantronics.com/uk

HCC VERDICT

A neat, if pricey, solution



Clips...

Small items that will make a big difference to your system

Atlas Eos Power Cords



From £160 approx

Looking for a power cable with no truck towards

RF and AC interference? It may be time to consider this insanely well-engineered example, which has twisted OFC conductors and PTFE insulation with plastic-bonded aluminium foil and a PVC sheath. www.atlascables.com

Russ Andrews UltraSocket



From £79 approx

Why stop with your power cables? These

wall-mounted sockets are designed to improve the connection of electronic equipment to the domestic mains supply. Available as a single or double, the UltraSocket is manufactured to BS1363 standard and features a custom faceplate made in high-impact and fire-resistant plastic. www.russandrews.com

VooMote Zapper app



£Free

The dongle that turns your iPhone in to a universal remote control is now

compatible with Apple's iCloud, allowing users to share their custom remote control configuration with multiple iDevices in one household. Get the app from the iTunes store. www.voomote.tv/en

Lindy MHL to HDMI adapter



£15 approx

This gizmo allows owners of non 'Smart'

HDTVs to still enjoy video and audio from their mobile device – as long as said device supports MHL (Mobile Hi-Definition Link) technology. Your smartphone connects via micro USB, while your TV hooks up via HDMI. Upscaling of non 1080p content is offered, too. www.lindy.co.uk

THE TOP 20

Choosing a home cinema system is a potential minefield that must be negotiated with great care or safely avoided by letting experts guide you. If you want to end up with a system that, as a minimum, meets your expectations in terms of picture and sound quality, reading magazine product reviews and choosing the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys can only ever be part of the answer at best. Looking for the cheapest price and having a system delivered to your door, even with a 'knowledgeable' friend to help set it up, is a well-trodden path to disappointment.

There is a bewildering choice of components on the market today and also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, or plasma, LCD or LED TV? 3D or non-3D? Full 1080p capability is now the only sensible choice but the appropriate source components, such as a Blu-ray player, need to be part of the equation. The sound performance of a system is also hugely important, even more so if you will be listening to music, or music DVD's, through the same system. If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Having an amp with the right inputs for the best connectivity is essential but you will also need to decide on a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub and, crucially, where they will be sited for the best results. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

ACHIEVING POTENTIAL

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer. This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis (that is without professional input) are performing at way below their optimum level. To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity. Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

WHAT AND WHERE TO BUY

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ...**don't** start with **WHAT**, start with **WHERE**. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit **you**.

“...Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience.”



So good you'll believe you're there!

GUIDE

TO BUYING HOME A CINEMA SYSTEM



BUYING OR BEING SOLD TO?

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a carefully selected group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

GETTING THE BEST DEAL

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a far better way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

LISTED BELOW ARE 20 OF THE BEST AV SHOPS IN THE COUNTRY

They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

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33 Sir Isaac's Walk. 01206 577682
www.newtechnologyunlimited.com

Kingston-upon-Thames INFIDELITY

9 High Street, Hampton Wick.
020 8943 3530
www.infidelity.co.uk

Maidenhead AUDIO VENUE

36 Queen Street. 01628 633995
www.audiovenue.com

Rayleigh, Essex RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION

44a High Street. 01268 779762
Custom Install Dept.
01268 776932
www.rayleighhifi.com

Southend-on-Sea RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION

132/4 London Road. 01702 435255
www.rayleighhifi.com

Tunbridge Wells KENT HOME CINEMA

69 London Road, Southborough.
01892 535007
www.kenthomecinema.co.uk

LONDON

Ealing AUDIO VENUE

27 Bond Street. 020 8567 8703
www.audiovenue.com

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI

190a New North Road. 020 7226 5500
www.grahams.co.uk

SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS

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www.oandlhifi.co.uk

SW20 O'BRIEN HI-FI

60 Durham Road.
020 8946 1528
www.obrienhifi.com

MIDLANDS

Coventry FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE

163 Spon Street. 024 7652 5200
www.frankharvey.co.uk

Nottingham CASTLE SOUND & VISION

48/50 Maid Marian Way. 0115 9584404
www.castlesoundvision.com

Solihull MUSIC MATTERS

93-95 Hobs Moat Road. 0121 742 0254
www.musicmatters.co.uk

NORTH

Chester ACOUSTICA

17 Hoole Road. 01244 344227
www.acoustica.co.uk

York SOUND ORGANISATION

2 Gillygate. 01904 627108
www.soundorg.co.uk



The majority of the above dealers are members of one or both of the major trade organisations, BADA or CEDIA.

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
SERVICE ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



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PLAYBACK

→ **Anton van Beek reviews** **THE ARTIST** Is silence truly golden in hi-def? **UNDERWORLD: AWAKENING 3D** Kate slips back into her old leather catsuit **THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO** David Fincher's remake is a real HD thriller **DIE HARD QUADRILOGY** From the sublime to the ridiculous **HAYWIRE** Battling babe conquers Blu-ray **AND MORE!**

Wild boys

The Grey → Entertainment in
Video → Region B BD

Wanna see Liam Neeson doing battle with a pack of killer wolves? So do we. See how *The Grey* fares on Blu-ray on p104...



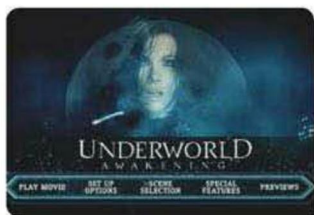
HCC Ratings key

Teenwolf	1 2 3 4 5
Airwolf	1 2 3 4 5
Beowulf	1 2 3 4 5
Virginia Woolf	1 2 3 4 5
Wolverhampton	1 2 3 4 5

Is it any surprise that Kate's fellow actors call her a pain in the neck?

Hell bent for leather

Can the return of Kate Beckinsale and some 3D magic save this ailing franchise?



HCC VERDICT

Underworld: Awakening 3D
Entertainment in Video
Region B BD → £25 Approx

We say: More of the same from this disappointing franchise – but the disc itself is excellent

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Underworld: Awakening 3D

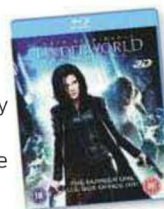
Presumably due to some sense of loyalty to the franchise (and series creator/husband Len Wiseman), Kate Beckinsale has been persuaded to get her leather catsuit out of mothballs and return to the role of gun-totting vampire vixen Selene. But, in all honesty, she needn't have bothered.

This is very much business as usual. There's action and violence a-plenty, but it all still looks like something out of a videogame and carries about the same dramatic weight. And don't even get me started on the CG abomination at the heart of this outing. One for die-hard fans only.

Picture: This single-disc release offers up both 2D and 3D 1080p presentations of the movie, depending on the capabilities of your system.

The AVC 2.40:1 'flat' version is pretty awesome. Blacks are suitably macabre and solid, detailing is immaculate and I can't spot any technical deficiencies with the encode itself. Okay, so the colour palette is essentially limited to various shades of blue, but that is an intentional aesthetic choice that's been true of every film in the series.

If the stereoscopic MVC 2.40:1 imagery isn't quite as impressive, that's due to the source

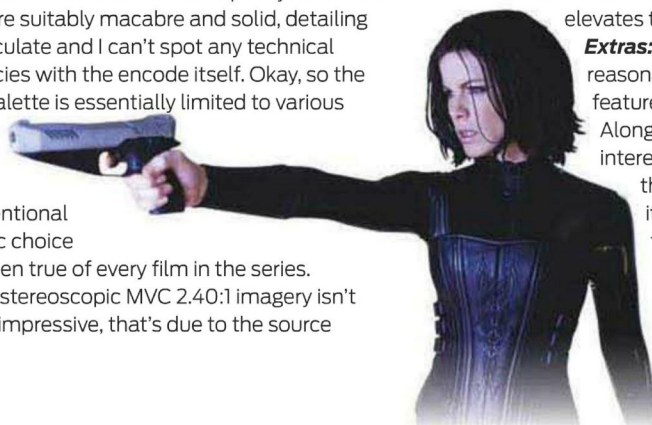


material rather than the encode. There are plenty of impressive 3D sequences, such as the establishing shot of Selene in the freezer unit in Chapter 2 or when she vaults over a car in Chapter 11, that have a palpable sense of depth. And there are also a handful of fun pop-out moments.

However, the film's overwhelming darkness makes many scenes look flat and hampers detail, robbing the image of spatial depth in these instances. It's far from a disaster, but definitely lacks consistency.

Audio: The DTS-HD MA 7.1 soundtrack is the best thing about this platter. From the opening shot, the full speaker array is employed constantly in extremely dynamic fashion. And while there's plenty of weight and raw power to the audio (such as the thundering bass that accompanies the Uber-wolf's footsteps in Chapters 7 and 11), there's also a sense of control and precision that elevates the mix to another level.

Extras: EiV's disc packs a reasonable batch of bonus features to sink your fangs into. Alongside a surprisingly interesting commentary from the directors and producers, it also offers up six behind-the-scenes featurettes, six previz videos (three in both 2D and 3D), a blooper reel and a music video.



Haywire

Momentum Pictures → Region B BD
£20 Approx



Having tried his hand at everything else, Steven Soderbergh has finally turned his attention to the

action genre. Stripped of most modern trappings, *Haywire* is a curious hybrid, stylistically somewhere between the '60s and the present day. Its success is primarily down to leading lady and Mixed Martial Arts fighter Gina Carano – an action star in the making.

The AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode is a rather hit-or-miss affair due to Soderbergh's stylistic tricks. At least the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix fares better with its combination of wonderful musical fidelity and clean Foley effects.



The Darkest Hour 3D

20th Century Fox → Region A/B BD/
R2 DVD → £25 Approx



Invisible aliens. Now there's a way for a studio to save money. However, when it

comes time for the big reveal, your alien beasts better be worth the wait – something that can't be said of the CG ETs that pop up in this invasion flick. Despite some moderately impressive MVC 2.40:1 3D visuals and lively DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio, *The Darkest Hour* is really no better than made-for-TV fodder like *Sand Sharks*. In other words, it's complete crap. If you care, the set's 2D platter also offers a 12-minute *Making of...*, deleted scenes and a short film.



Coriolanus

Lionsgate → Region B BD
£25 Approx



Like *Richard III* and *Romeo + Juliet* before it, Ralph Fiennes' directorial debut gives one of he

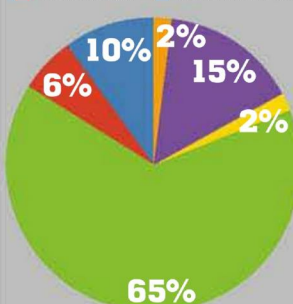
Shakespeare's plays a modern spin. A tale of warmongering and politics infused with imagery dragged straight from contemporary war zones, it makes for an arresting piece of cinema – even if it isn't the most approachable of the Bard's works. The grainy, documentary-style visuals are accurately recreated by the disc's AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is more expansive than you might expect. Also included are a *Making of...*, an hour of interviews and a director's commentary.



We asked...

Which of this year's sci-fi blockbusters are you most excited about?

John Carter Battleship
Lockout Prometheus
Total Recall None of them



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action



A picture worth a thousand words

Can the award-winning silent movie bag even more plaudits as it hits Blu-ray?

→ The Artist

Despite all of the awards heaped on it, this homage to silent cinema really isn't the best film of the last year – it's not even the best film I've seen this month. To give *The Artist* its dues, it is a funny, inventive and charming romantic-comedy-drama about the arrival of the 'Talkies' to Hollywood. Don't go expecting the most incredible movie experience of your life and you'll be fine.

Picture: *The Artist* is a well-shot film that makes for an attractive hi-def viewing experience. The AVC 1080p encode delivers a 1.33:1 monochrome image comprised of rich blacks, crisp whites and an impressively wide range of perfectly rendered shades of grey between them.

Detailing is generally strong – certainly refined enough to just about make out the text in the 'Kinograph Studios to Stop All Silent Productions...' story in the newspaper in Chapter 5. My only real criticism is the evidence of slight digital filtering in some scenes, although this may well be a hold-over from the post-production process rather than an issue with the BD master.

Audio: As a modern take on the silent film, it's not too surprising to discover that *The Artist's* DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack isn't particularly expansive.

Where the mix really excels is in its handling of Ludovic Bource's score, which is delivered with rich, warm tones that swell up all around you from every speaker. There are also a handful of sonic surprises in the mix (one of the most notable examples happens in Chapter 4) which I don't want to spoil here. Suffice to say that they succeed in adding some additional flair and dynamism to the Blu-ray's lossless soundtrack. Maybe these silent films could catch on...



HCC VERDICT

The Artist → Entertainment
in Video → Region B BD
£25 Approx

We say: It's not perfect, but this fun film still provides hours of entertainment on Blu-ray

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: While not exactly overflowing with an abundance of bonus features, this Blu-ray does have some that are worth dipping into.

The Artist: The Making of a Hollywood Love Story provides a 22-minute overview of the film's production and *Hollywood as a Character* devotes its five-minute running time to exploring the importance of the film's locations. *The Artisans Behind the Artist* offers up a quartet of short vignettes dedicated to *The Production Design*, *The Cinematography*, *The Costumes* and *The Composer*. While none of these mini featurettes lasts longer than four minutes, each manages to get to the heart of its subject and highlight the talented individuals involved with each aspect of the filmmaking process.

Rounding out the set is blooper reel and a wonderful 45-minute on-stage Q&A with writer/director Michael Hazanavicius, producer Thomas Langmann and actors Jean Dujardin, Bérénice Bejo and Missi Pyle.



Conjoined twins
were a mainstay
of silent films

Blu-ray with a vengeance

Previously missing on UK shores, the third *Die Hard* finally shows up in this hi-def boxset

→ Die Hard Quadrilogy



New York cop John McClane (Bruce Willis) just doesn't seem to be able to catch a break. He spent Christmas 1988 dealing with terrorists holding his wife and other workers hostage in an LA office.

Two years later his Christmas was ruined by mercenaries taking control of Washington's Dulles Airport. No wonder that by 1995 he'd become a washed-up alcoholic, coaxed back in to action by a nuttier with a vendetta against him. And then in 2007 he quit swearing and turned into a virtual superhero, surfing on the back of a jet in his quest to foil a computer hacker.

In cinematic terms this all equates to one of the best action films in the history of cinema, a somewhat repetitive follow-up, a really enjoyable buddy movie and a complete betrayal of everything the character once stood for.

Picture: Three of the discs in this set have been previously available separately in the UK and arrive here completely unaltered (the first film could do with a little more spit and polish, the second is extremely muddy at times and the fourth is as sharp as you'd expect from a modern blockbuster). As such, the real point of interest is the UK Blu-ray debut of *Die Hard with a Vengeance*. Free from the edge enhancement and muted colour palette that plagued previous DVD releases, the AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode represents a definite step up in quality. However, there's still room for improvement, thanks to the less-than-pristine nature of the source print and a couple of obvious instances of compression artefacting.



Audio: All four films feature DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtracks. The first, second and fourth films sound the same as ever on Blu-ray. In other words, slightly processed when it comes to the first two and like your front room has been transported into the heart of a war zone with the fourth. *Die Hard with a Vengeance* ranks somewhere between the two extremes. Use of the surrounds is more expansive than its two predecessors, but there's also a lack of the finesse and raw power of *Die Hard 4.0*'s mix.

Extras: Once again, the extras accompanying the first, second and fourth film are the same as ever, with nothing added or removed since the standalone releases. Newcomer *Die Hard with a Vengeance* offers up the most comprehensive set of archive goodies in the collection, in the form of a commentary, alternate ending, interviews, a trio of promo featurettes, six split-screen visual effects comparisons, storyboards and trailers.



HCC VERDICT

Die Hard Quadrilogy → 20th Century Fox → Region B BD (Die Hard 1/2/4) / All-region BD (Die Hard 3) → £40 Approx

We say: Blu-ray box shows its age

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

The Sitter

20th Century Fox → All-region BD
£15 Approx



Following *Pineapple Express* and *Your Highness*, it looks like David Gordon Green's fascination with

updating '80s movies for modern audiences has come a cropper at last. An update of *Adventures in Babysitting*, this tiresome new comedy ditched the simple charm of the original in favour of swearing. Hilarious it ain't.

Fox's Blu-ray serves up oddly soft AVC 1.85:1 1080p presentations of both 81-minute 'theatrical' and 87-minute 'extended' cuts of the film. At least the surprisingly lively DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix fares better. The extras are fairly cursory and don't warrant repeated viewing.

1 2 3 4 5

Shame

Momentum Pictures → Region B BD
£20 Approx



These days it seems I can't spin up a Blu-ray without being confronted by actor Michael Fassbender.

It feels like he's been in at least half of the films released last year. But I'll keep watching as long as he gives performances like his turn in this riveting exploration of sex addiction.

The film's low-budget roots show through in the excessively grainy night footage that dominates the disc's AVC 2.40:1 1080p transfer. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix proves surprisingly robust with plenty of use of the surrounds and throbbing bass. Two short interviews and a lengthy Q&A make up the extras.

1 2 3 4 5

Martha Marcy May Marlene

20th Century Fox → All-Region BD
£25 Approx



For all of its narrative flaws – not to mention its annoying title – there's a lot to like about this assured

debut feature from writer-director Sean Durkin. Not least is Elizabeth Olsen's incredible central performance as a young woman who flees life in an abusive cult to take refuge with her sister.

Fox's Blu-ray serves up a detailed yet low-contrast AVC 2.40:1 1080p transfer that gives the film a deliberately dream-like atmosphere, aided brilliantly by the moody DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack. Slightly disappointing extras consist of interviews and a short film.

1 2 3 4 5

Dream House

Warner Home Video → All-region BD
/R2 DVD → £25 Approx



Disowned by director Jim Sheridan and stars Daniel Craig and Rachel Weisz after being re-edited by

producers, it's hardly a surprise that *Dream House* is a nightmarish movie. But who knew it would be such a prime piece of car crash cinema? Thanks to its muddled tone, off-kilter performances and breathtakingly inane mid-film twist you just can't help but keep watching, no matter how grotesque it all seems. Being a terrible film doesn't stop it looking and sounding superb on BD thanks to a brilliant AVC 2.40:1 encode and explosive DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio. Fascinatingly awful.

1 2 3 4 5

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Arcade action

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. Check out these two videogames vying for time on your home cinema system...

Ridge Racer: Unbounded

Namco → Xbox 360/PS3/PC → £50 Approx



The *Ridge Racer* franchise has always been about one thing and one thing only – drift racing through city streets. No matter what instalment in the series you played, the basic set-up was the same: jam your finger down on the accelerator and never let go,

carrying as much speed as possible into every corner as you modulate your braking to powerslide around every bend in the road.

But as well as its unwieldy subtitle, *Ridge Racer: Unbounded* adds another element to the template – mass destruction. Taking a leaf out of the *Burnout* book of arcade racers, ...*Unbounded* is all about charging up a power bar by sliding, catching air or riding slipstreams, and when it hits maximum, crashing through buildings and ramming your opponents off the road.

Even though it's never quite as explosive or exciting as either the *Burnout* games or the under-appreciated *Split/Second*, it's still a hugely enjoyable arcade racer – one that injects some fresh life into the *Ridge Racer* franchise while also presenting gamers with a serious challenge if they ever want to conquer it. And for those that do, there's even a track editor waiting to be played with.

With its spectacular graphics and thumping audio it also feels right at home on the bigscreen. So what are you waiting for?

1 2 3 4 5

Silent Hill: Downpour

Konami → Xbox 360/PS3 → £50 Approx



Psychological horror is a tricky thing to pull off in a videogame. But it's something that the first couple of games in the *Silent Hill* series managed with aplomb. Unfortunately, recent years haven't been quite so kind to the franchise, with a greater emphasis being placed on combat at the cost of the more subtle chills that once proved so effective.



In attempting to find a balance between the two styles, ...*Downpour* proves to be neither one thing nor the other. Fans of action games will be

disappointed by the clumsy combat system, while those craving something more cerebral will feel let down by the game's constant recourse to bludgeoning things to death.

Which is a real shame, because at times the game shows genuine flashes of brilliance. There are a handful of truly creepy moments waiting to be unearthed by those who stick with it and you can't help but wish they were anchored to a better game. The visuals are also prove to be particularly atmospheric, even more so if you have the kit to make use of the native 3D mode, which succeeds in drawing you into the onscreen action and makes the horror seem that bit more immediate.

1 2 3 4 5

True Blood: Season Four

HBO Home Entertainment → All-region BD → £45 Approx



This supernatural series has never been afraid to court controversy with its graphic sex and violence. But that's nothing compared to the fuss generated by the fairy-filled opening to the latest season. This Marmite moment caused some fans to claim *True Blood* had finally jumped the shark, but for my money it's only a minor

blip in an otherwise enjoyable saga about rogue witches and amnesiac vampires. Long-time fans will know what to expect from the set's excellent AVC 1.78:1 1080p encodes and DTS-HD MA 5.1 mixes, as well as the typically underwhelming extras.

1 2 3 4 5

Suits: Season One

Universal Playback → R2 DVD → £30 Approx



Harvey Specter is a charismatic high-flying lawyer. Mike Ross, his new junior associate, is a college drop-out who has never even studied law, but has helped a lot of people cheat their way through the exams. How's that for a high concept? Well, while *Suits* is sometimes a little too smug for its own good, for the most part it's a well-written

show with excellent performances. This DVD release boasts pleasingly sharp anamorphic 1.78:1 transfers (hooray!), flat Dolby 2.0 soundtracks (boo!) and middling extras (hmm?). Which leaves this court of opinion stuck with a hung jury...

1 2 3 4 5

Breaking Bad: Season Three

Sony Pictures → R2 DVD → £30 Approx



It's not easy being a *Breaking Bad* fan in the UK. Not only has the show all but disappeared from the airwaves, but the UK branch of Sony Pictures is almost a year behind its US counterpart in bringing it to DVD – and doesn't even offer a Blu-ray version on this side of the Atlantic.

Thankfully, this four-disc release goes some way to making up for all of the difficulties. The anamorphic 1.78:1 transfer is rich and detailed, while the DD5.1 sonics are fairly enveloping (although dialogue feels a little buried at times). There's even a bumper crop of extras to enjoy.

1 2 3 4 5

The Return of the Living Dead: SE

Second Sight → Region B BD → £23 Approx



Here's a real contender for my favourite Blu-ray of the year. While the AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode of this zombie horror-comedy isn't exactly razor-sharp, this is more to do with the film's coarse grain and low-fi origins than any overt digital filtering. The disc also offers an LPCM dual-mono presentation of the film's

original soundtrack (previously unavailable due to copyright issues) alongside LPCM 2.0 and DTS 5.1 versions of the alternate track. A plethora of extras is headlined by a superb two-hour doc that I would have happily paid for as a standalone release.

1 2 3 4 5

Lisbeth Salander is
all kitted out for the
next London riots



Crime and punishment

Hollywood's take on the hit Scandinavian murder-mystery is criminally good

→ The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo

Having staked a claim as Hollywood's modern master of crime cinema with 2007's *Zodiac*, David Fincher returns to the genre for this English-language adaptation of Stieg Larsson's bestseller.

While some may think the film redundant given the quality of the 2009 Scandinavian version, Fincher's is a remarkably faithful and stylistically superior adaptation of the source material.

Indeed, it's only real problem is that as good as Rooney Mara is as Lisbeth Salander, nothing she does can banish memories of Noomi Rapace's iconic performance in the same role.

Picture: Thanks to its deliberately bleak and cold aesthetic design, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* isn't necessarily what you'd call an attractive move. But nobody could possibly deny that it's a beautifully rendered Blu-ray.

The AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode is impeccably sharp and detailed, ensuring that textures appear true to source throughout. Even more importantly, the shadowy blacks that play such a large part in the film's visual palette are absolutely rock solid and completely free from crush.

As for technical deficiencies with the encode, beyond some light banding (possibly a hold-over from the original HD source) there's nothing to be seen. No compression artefacting. No sharpening. In other words, it's about as good as you could possibly hope for.

Audio: As fine as the Blu-ray's picture quality might be, it's still trumped by the disc's DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 audio.

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo's finds Fincher working once again with composer Trent Reznor and sound designer Ren Klyce, and the result is so unique and audacious that it's frequently difficult to decipher where the film's score ends and sound design begins. Thankfully, the BD's lossless 5.1 mix ensures that the transition to the home environment is flawless, replicating the above effect whilst simultaneously handling the expansive surround steering and tonally rich dialogue. For my money, it's up there with the very best mixes available on Blu-ray.

Extras: As fans will have come to expect from Fincher's previous films, *...Dragon Tattoo* arrives on Blu-ray as a two-disc set with plenty of bonus features. The first disc is where you'll find another of the filmmaker's engaging audio commentaries. Over on the second disc there are various character-related interviews, vignettes and galleries, a discussion of the original novel, 12 production featurettes, a multi-angle breakdown of the title sequence, trailers, a visual effects montage and much, much more.



HCC VERDICT

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo
Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£25 Approx

We say: The only mystery yet to be solved is why every Blu-ray release can't be this impressive

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



It was at that moment the others decided never to let Liam land the plane again



Sheep in wolf's clothing

Liam Neeson's latest may not be what you expect – but is actually all the better for it



→ The Grey

The past few years have seen Liam Neeson transformed into Hollywood's most unexpected action hero. While *The Grey* is more thoughtful and meditative than, say *Taken*, it still gives the actor plenty of tough-guy dialogue to work with, playing one of seven survivors of a plane crash trying to avoid being eaten by a pack of wolves in the Alaskan wilderness. Even if it isn't quite the wolf-punching action flick the trailer promised, this is still a superior thriller with yet another star turn from its leading man.

Picture: As with his debut movie *Narc*, director Joe Carnahan has opted for a very stylised aesthetic approach to this latest film.

The most obvious visual quirk is the amount of grain present in the Blu-ray AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode. It gets so heavy at times that it's hard to tell the difference between snow being blown around in the middle of a storm and grain buzzing around like angry mosquitos. Coupled with the stark exteriors, this has the downside of robbing some shots of clarity and detail – which is a real shame, as there are some excellent close-ups in that show what the encode is truly capable of when not held back by stylistic tricks.

Audio: Any small concerns I might harbour about the picture quality have no impact whatsoever on the Blu-ray soundtrack. *The Grey* features an incredibly immersive and powerful DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 mix that easily grounds you in

the heart of an inhospitable wilderness alongside the film's characters.

From the moment that the plane encounters turbulence in Chapter 2 you know that you're in for a bit of a wild ride. Then you're transported into the heart of an Alaskan storm, with gale force winds whipping up snow all around your living room. Even when the weather settles down, the mix doesn't. The pursuing wolves are always making their presence felt – audibly if not visually. A prime example being the race to the forest in Chapter 6, followed by the sound of the wolves barking and howling as they circle around you, unseen in the darkness, while the survivors rush to light a fire. Magnificent stuff.

Extras: Ordinarily, a BD platter with so few extras would leave me howling mad. Sure enough, the lack of anything beyond a commentary and some deleted scenes is disappointing. However, the chat-track by Carnahan and editors Roger Barton and Jason Hellman is an absolute barnstormer and pulls no punches (such as Carnahan's description of one of the executive producers: 'That ****ing bozo Bill Johnson. Sorry bro', you don't get to get off the hook. You're lucky your name's still on the film').

The six deleted scenes (one of which is actually an extended sequence) are mainly forgettable, but worth checking out solely for a laughable encounter with a polar bear that was wisely dropped from the film. All of the footage is presented in 1080p.

HCC VERDICT

The Grey → Entertainment in Video → Region B BD £25 Approx

We say: The astonishing audio mix makes this haunting thriller worth hunting down in hi-def

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

The Reptile: SE

StudioCanal → Region B BD/R2 DVD
£20 Approx



While Hammer only ever made one werewolf flick (1961's *The Curse of the Werewolf*), it explored

alternate approaches to the concept in 1964's *The Gorgon* and this 1966 movie. Filmed back-to-back with *The Plague of the Zombies*, it's far from Hammer's best, but, like its sibling, is well shot and full of interesting subtexts. This restored hi-def release features a luxurious new AVC 1.66:1 1080p transfer and pleasingly clear LPCM 2.0 mono soundtrack. A 22-min retrospective doc, the *Wicked Women* episode of *World of Hammer*, a restoration comparison and the trailer make up the Blu-ray extras.



Pillow Talk

Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx



A key film in the development of the romantic-comedy, this 1959 vehicle for Doris Day and Rock

Hudson finds them lighting up the screen as an uptight career woman and the carefree playboy she is forced into sharing her telephone line with.

While this new restoration does wonders for the film's vibrant palette, the AVC 2.35:1 1080p encode is let down slightly by DNR (most obviously on the split-screen opticals). The extras aren't particularly plentiful, but the informative commentary and *Back in Bed...* retrospective doc prove to be well worth checking investigating.



Deadball

Bounty Films → R2 DVD
£16 Approx



Yūdai Yamaguchi's latest is basically the *Story of Ricky* of baseball movies. Tak Sakaguchi stars

as a rebellious youngster whose deadly baseball skills find him serving time in a prison run by Neo Nazis (don't ask). What follows is a deliriously bad taste mix of slapstick splatter and hilariously awful CG effects – and it had me laughing like a drain throughout.

This two-disc edition hits a bit of a home run with its colourful anamorphic 1.78:1 transfer and boisterous DTS and DD5.1 mixes. Extras include an isolated score, short film and the second part of a wedding video (again, don't ask).



Sleeping Beauty

Revolver → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Subversive subject matter. Lengthy takes. A detached approach to its characters. There's

not a single element of this film that doesn't scream 'debut movie'. Julia Leigh's frustrating flick wants to have its cake and eat it, enticing viewers with lingering shots of Emily 'Sucker Punch' Browning's naked body while making vague statements about being complicit in acts of voyeurism. Yawn...

The BD's AVC 1.85:1 1080p imagery is sharp enough to thrill leering perverts. Predictably, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is biased to the front speakers. Extras consist of interviews and a trailer.



Waking the dead in high-definition

Hammer's classic tale of Voodoo worship and the living dead is resurrected on Blu-ray



→ The Plague of the Zombies

Sinister events are afoot in a small Cornish village. Not only is a mysterious plague killing off the locals – but those it affects don't seem keen on staying put in their coffins. But what could all of this possibly have something to do with the sadistic Squire Hamilton, recently returned from a stay in Haiti?

While its plot leaves something to be desired, John Gilling's film is one of the true gems of the Hammer catalogue. With its nightmarish imagery and thrilling performances it's an astonishing work that easily trumps the studio's better-known *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* outings.

Picture: According to Jon Mann, Technical Restoration Manager, Pinewood Studios, *The Plague of the Zombies*'s negative was in a pretty sorry state. 'It had multiple rips on a lot of the joins,' he reveals in the accompanying documentary, evidence of which can still be seen in the brief instances of frame wobble that occurs at points in the film (such as the cut following the huntsmen riding away from the carriage at 00:07:39). Mann states that this is apparently an unavoidable side effect of the rips in the negative and the fact that the restoration team had to 'reconstruct the [frames] that are missing and try to put them in the same alignment'.

Additionally, minor print damage still exists in backgrounds if you look for it. Mann states his team only completely removes all traces of print damage in areas that are meant to be the main focus of your attention, such as faces, in order to maintain the 'charm' of the old source prints.



Novelty beds were all the rage in the 18th Century

HCC VERDICT

The Plague of the Zombies: SE
StudioCanal → Region B BD/
R2 DVD → £20 Approx

We say: A great hi-def package for this undervalued horror gem

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



Otherwise the AVC 1.66:1 1080p encode is a triumph. The richness of the colours and level of detail easily rivals the studio's earlier *Quatermass and the Pit* remaster and there are no traces of edge enhancement or artefacting. All told, this Blu-ray resurrects *The Plague of the Zombies* in spectacular style and is an epic improvement on every previous version released.

Audio: The LPCM 2.0 mono mix is everything you could hope for from a film of this vintage – clean, precise and surprisingly detailed. Naturally, it can hardly compete with a modern remix in sonic grunt, but what did you expect?

Extras: There aren't any real surprises to be found in the disc's extras, but they still provide good value for fans of Hammer's output. You get a new half-hour documentary, an episode of *World of Hammer*, a restoration comparison and the trailer – all in 1080p. The set also includes a bonus DVD copy of the film.

Demo screen

King Kong's rumble in the jungle reveals why this giant ape is still king of the hi-def swingers



King Kong

Universal Pictures → All-region BD → £15 Approx

Time code: 112.20 – 120.43 (Extended Cut)



Having fallen in love with the 1933 original as a small child, filmmaker Peter Jackson had always harboured a desire to remake *King Kong*. And, after several false starts, his dream finally came true in 2005 with this bloated \$200-million take on the simian story.

While Jackson's 'everything *and* the kitchen sink' approach to the remake causes no end of narrative problems, it also leads to some truly spectacular set-pieces – none more so than the rumble in Skull Island's jungle that pits Kong against a family of dinosaurs.

While it may be fairly simple to script a sequence of this nature, shooting it is another thing altogether. As Jackson himself admits, 'If you imagine being a director trying to shoot this, you actually have nothing to shoot other than Naomi [Watts] and a blue screen.'

Monkey business

Because of this, the true success of the sequence belongs to WETA Digital's visual effects artists and the film's sound designers. And thanks to the exquisitely delineated VC-1 2.40:1 1080p encode and DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix on Universal's Blu-ray release, you can savour each element.

The hi-def visuals are so incredibly precise and detailed that practically each hair on Kong's body can be easily seen on a correctly calibrated screen. The remarkable clarity and lush colour saturation also serve to give the imagery a sense of depth many stereoscopic encodes would be jealous of.

Likewise, the 5.1 audio is pure reference quality – from the seamless panning around the soundstage to Naomi's shrill screams and Kong's booming blows. There's so much going on it should be a relentless cacophony, yet it's all so beautifully controlled and refined that it'll leave you roaring in triumph – just like Kong himself in the final shot ●

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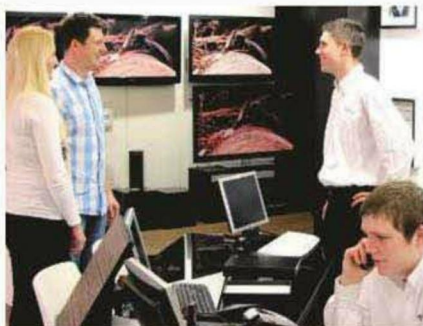
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HCC Ratings key

Officially awesome	1 2 3 4 5
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TV screens



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Manufacturer	Model	Price	Size (inches)	3D type	Panel type	HDMI	Component	PC	Networking	Internet TV	Wi-fi ready	Freeview HD	Freesat HD	Issue	Rating	Comment
LG	50PZ950T	£1,600	50	A	PDP	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	196	12345	Excellent all rounder, minor judder
LG	47LW550T	£1,200	47	P	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	194	12345	Web browser is multimedia icing
LG	55LW980T	£2,500	55	P	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	202	12345	Rear LED, passive TV is superb
LG	55LM660T	£2,100	55	P	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	208	12345	Passive 3D impresses at this size
Loewe	Individual Compose 3D	£5,000	46	A	LED	3	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	202	12345	Debut 3D screen offers motorised control and built-in HDD
Panasonic	TX-P55VT30	£2,700	55	A	PDP	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	197	12345	Sublime plasma is best-in-class
Panasonic	TX-L37DT30	£950	37	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	196	12345	Do-it-all 3D capable thin screen
Panasonic	TX-L42E3B	£600	42	-	LED	3	1	1	-	-	-	+	-	200	12345	No frills 42in LED seems expensive
Panasonic	TX-P50GT30	£1,800	50	A	PDP	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	195	12345	Stunning 2D and 3D mid-ranger
Panasonic	TX-P42ST30	£1,200	42	A	PDP	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	198	12345	Entry-level 3D plasma
Panasonic	TX-P50ST50	£1,400	50	A	PDP	3	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	208	12345	Mid-range PDP, smooth motion
Philips	42PFL7666	£900	42	P	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	207	12345	Affordable Passive Ambilight
Philips	50PFL7956	£2,000	50	P	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	205	12345	21:9 ratio TV for the masses
Philips	46PFL9706	£2,300	46	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	204	12345	Moth Eye tech reaps benefits
Samsung	UE40D6530	£1,100	40	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	198	12345	Brilliant pictures and Smart skills
Samsung	UE40D7000	£1,400	40	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	197	12345	Gorgeous TV, superb performance
Samsung	UE55D8000	£2,500	55	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	196	12345	Minor 3D X-talk, otherwise stunning
Samsung	UE60D8000	£4,300	60	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	200	12345	Big screen comes with a big price
Samsung	UE40D5520	£600	40	-	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	200	12345	Superb budget set is hard to fault
Samsung	PS64D8000	£2,400	64	A	PDP	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	204	12345	Giant plasma at a good price
Samsung	PS51D6900	£1,000	51	A	PDP	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	198	12345	Aggressively priced 3D bigscreen
Samsung	UE55ES8000	£2,500	55	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	206	12345	Seductive design, full of features
Sharp	LC-46LE831E	£1,300	46	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	199	12345	Sharp's best LED screen ever
Sharp	LC-60LE636E	£2,600	60	-	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	208	12345	Get it for as little as £1,200 online
Sony	KDL-40CX523	£550	40	-	CCFL	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	200	12345	CCFL screen packs tons of features
Sony	KDL-40HX723	£1,300	40	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	201	12345	Excellent bigscreen all-rounder
Sony	KDL-40EX524	£800	40	-	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	197	12345	Great features, decent 2D-only pics
Toshiba	42RL853	£600	42	-	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	199	12345	Affordable 42incher with few frills
Toshiba	42HL833	£500	42	-	LED	2	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	200	12345	Good HD pics but only two HDMI's
Toshiba	47VL863	£900	47	P	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	201	12345	Suffers from limited contrast
Toshiba	32UL863	£500	32	-	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	204	12345	Feature-rich 32incher impresses
Toshiba	40RL858	£500	40	-	LED	3	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	206	12345	No 3D, but a good all-round effort
Toshiba	55WL863	£1,800	55	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	203	12345	CEVO-powered TV is first-rate

A= Active. P= Passive

TV SCREENS EXPLAINED...

PLASMA VS LCD. PLUS, 3D'S RIVAL SYSTEMS

The TV market is becoming increasingly dominated by LED-lit LCD screens that are much thinner than traditional cold cathode fluorescent lamp (CCFL) screens. For 42in and above, plasma display panels (PDPs) come into play. These generally offer superior black levels, better viewing angles and less 3D cross-talk, but less brightness.

Most 3D screens feature the Active system that uses expensive powered 3D specs to deliver full HD images to each eye. Passive 3D TVs have a filter over the screen and use non-powered specs with polarising filters. The glasses are cheap as chips, but the resolution of 3D is halved to 540 lines.

Editor's Choice...

PHILIPS

40in → 40PFL9706 → £2,300 Approx

Adding something called a Moth Eye Filter to a TV is bound to grab attention – as does this set's luxurious, silver bezel design. And that anti-reflective filter reaps rewards – picture quality on this high-end screen is superb.

Tested: Issue 204

For more info visit: www.philips.co.uk



Blu-ray players



Manufacturer	Model	Price	BD Live storage	3D	Multi-channel analogue out	HDMI	USB	Online portal	Wi-fi ready	DVD-Audio/SACD	Issue	Rating	Comment
Arcam	FMJ-BDP100	£1,000	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	194	12345	Rock-solid build quality and pics to match
Cambridge Audio	Azur 751BD	£800	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	+	199	12345	Universal deck performs well, needs more 'net
Denon	DBP-1611UD	£400	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	194	12345	Awful GUI but 3D pics are as good as it gets
Denon	DBP-2012UD	£750	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	198	12345	High-performance player with battleship build
Dune	Smart B1	£240	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	198	12345	Advanced networking features will wow techies
LG	BX580	£150	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	189	12345	Reasonable BD pics, messy DVD upscaler
LG	BD670	£170	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	199	12345	Smart BD player offers great value
Marantz	UD7006	£800	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	200	12345	Superior AV performance and tasty design
NAD	M56	£1,900	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	183	12345	Motion processing issues spoil the day
Onkyo	BD-SP808	£500	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	195	12345	Accomplished disc spinner. Slow disc loader
Onkyo	BD-SP809	£500	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	+	203	12345	Performs well, but lacks features for this price
Oppo	BDP-95EU	£900	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	+	197	12345	Even better build and results than the BDP-93EU
Oppo	BDP-93EU	£500	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	+	195	12345	Awesomely good video and music performance
Oppo	BDP-83SE	£1,300	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	190	12345	Precision engineered analogue audio output
Panasonic	DMP-BD75	£110	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	196	12345	OK images, quick loader, underwhelming to use
Panasonic	DMP-BDT310	£260	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	+	194	12345	Terrific new GUI, refined sound and pictures
Panasonic	DMP-BDT300	£260	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	+	194	12345	Versatile, aging deck. Look out for discounts
Panasonic	DMP-BDT500	£300	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	+	208	12345	Sonically superior, awkward touchpad remote
Panasonic	BFT800EBK	£650	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	192	12345	Built-in soundbar and iPod dock. Great 3D pics
Philips	BDP7600	£200	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	198	12345	Feature-heavy deck with open web browser
Philips	BDP7500 MKII	£200	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	194	12345	Slickly designed with decent 2D and 3D images
Pioneer	BDP-LX53	£400	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	187	12345	Basic and slow to load but impressive BD pics
Primare	BD32	£3,500	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	+	206	12345	Ultimate high-end universal player
Samsung	BD-D7500	£250	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	198	12345	Style-centric wall-mountable 3D player
Samsung	BD-D6900	£300	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	195	12345	Decent BD deck with built-in Freeview HD tuner
Samsung	BD-C6900	£255	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	194	12345	Quick loader, versatile deck. Passable pictures
Samsung	BD-E8500	£400	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	207	12345	Smart PVR with 3D Blu-ray playback
Sharp	BD-HP90S	£290	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	194	12345	Slot-loading vertical design, expensive
Sony	BDP-S380	£130	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	199	12345	Budget player misses out on 3D and networking
Sony	BDP-S480	£150	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	198	12345	Brilliant deck offers superior VOD at a low price
Sony	BDP-SX1	£300	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	202	12345	Portable, WSVGA resolution, but outputs Full HD
Sony	BDP-S185	£90	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	204	12345	Solid budget way to get IPTV and Blu-ray
Toshiba	BDX3100	£185	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	194	12345	Feature-light but does the job with solid pics
Toshiba	BDX3200	£150	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	197	12345	Unexciting player can't compete with rivals
Yamaha	BD-A1010	£500	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	+	203	12345	Universal deck with a few flaws

NEW ENTRY

BLU-RAY EXPLAINED...

MATCHING YOUR DECK TO YOUR AMP

Blu-ray decks are designed to deliver top-notch images (some do it much better than others of course) but Blu-ray is also about enjoying superior quality sound. When choosing a deck, bear in mind the connectivity and decoding features of your amplifier. If it's an older model that doesn't have HDMI inputs then you'll need a BD player with multichannel analogue audio outputs to enjoy hi-res surround sound formats. Most current AVRs have HDMI inputs that accept bitstreamed Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA, but not all receivers can cope with 3D video signals, in which case you'll need a deck with dual HDMI outputs – one for the amp, one for the TV.

Editor's Choice...

SAMSUNG
BD-E8500 → £400 Approx

£400 may seem a lot for a 3D Blu-ray player, but Samsung's sleek-looking BD-E8500 doubles as a twin-tuner Freeview HD PVR, with 500GB of recording space. The raft of Smart features onboard includes VOD access, CD ripping and media streaming. Outside of the PS3, it's hard to find a product with such flexibility.

Tested: Issue 207
For more info visit: www.samsung.co.uk



AV Receivers



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Claimed power	THX	Multi-ch in	HDMI in	HDMI out	3D	Dolby True HD	DTS HD MA	Networking	Net tuner	Issue	Rating	Comment
Anthem	MRX 700	£2,100	7 x 120W	+	+	4	1	+	+	+	+	+	195	100000	Complex set-up, great EQ sound
Arcam	AVR400	£1,700	7 x 90W	+	+	5	1	+	+	+	+	+	194	100000	Beautifully built. Ace analogue audio
Denon	AVR-4311	£2,000	9 x 170W	+	+	6	2	+	+	+	+	+	193	100000	Polished audio, Airplay streaming
Denon	AVR-1912	£450	7 x 90W	+	+	6	1	+	+	+	+	+	204	100000	Lacks gusto and video scaling
Denon	AVR-2311	£800	7 x 135W	+	+	6	1	+	+	+	+	+	190	100000	iPod dock but no networking
Denon	AVR-3312	£1,000	7 x 165W	+	+	7	2	+	+	+	+	+	202	100000	New GUI, AirPlay as standard
Marantz	NRI602	£550	7 x 50W	+	+	4	1	+	+	+	+	+	201	100000	Slimline AVR is forward-thinking
NAD	T 757	£1,500	7 x 60W	+	+	4	1	+	+	+	+	+	201	100000	Limited features, but superb sound
Onkyo	TX-NR609	£500	7 x 60W	+	+	6	1	+	+	+	+	+	195	100000	Comprehensive, stunning performer
Onkyo	TX-NR5009	£2,700	9 x 220W	+	+	8	2	+	+	+	+	+	203	100000	Full-blooded 9-channel powerhouse
Onkyo	TX-SR308	£250	5 x 100W	+	+	3	1	+	+	+	+	+	191	100000	Under specified and under powered
Onkyo	TX-NR1009	£1,300	9 x 180W	+	+	8	2	+	+	+	+	+	205	100000	Smooth sound; THX Select2
Pioneer	VSX-520	£300	5 x 130W	+	+	3	1	+	+	+	+	+	191	100000	Decent sound; spring-clip terminals
Pioneer	SC-LX83	£2,000	7 x 190W	+	+	3	1	+	+	+	+	+	186	100000	Punchy audio with superb control
Pioneer	SC-LX85	£2,000	9 x 190W	+	+	7	2	+	+	+	+	+	205	100000	Heady mix of power and features
Pioneer	VSX-920	£500	7 x 140W	+	+	4	1	+	+	+	+	+	185	100000	Cool iPod integration, lacks guts a bit
Pioneer	VSX-2021	£800	7 x 150W	+	+	7	2	+	+	+	+	+	200	100000	Class-leading control and RoomEQ
T+A	K8	£6,000	7 x 150W	+	+	3	1	+	+	+	+	+	205	100000	High-end AVR with built-in BD deck
Yamaha	RXV-3067	£1,500	7 x 140W	+	+	8	2	+	+	+	+	+	194	100000	Superb and musical reproduction
Yamaha	RXV-471	£300	5 x 105W	+	+	4	1	+	+	+	+	+	199	100000	Brilliant sounding entry-level AVR
Yamaha	RX-A3010	£2,000	7 x 230W	+	+	8	2	+	+	+	+	+	207	100000	The true successor to the Z11
Yamaha	RXV-1067	£850	7 x 105W	+	+	8	2	+	+	+	+	+	190	100000	Optimised for cinema. Good connects

Systems



Manufacturer	Model	Price	3D	Claimed power	Configuration	Dolby True HD	DTS HD MA	HDMI in/out	Component	Online portal	Wi-fi ready	Issue	Rating	Comment
Harman/Kardon	BDS800	£1,100	+	525W	5.1	+	+	0/1	+	+	+	194	100000	Nil by 1080p24. OK performance
Harman/Kardon	BDS470	£650	+	330W	2.1	+	+	3/1	+	+	+	206	100000	Performance-first 2.1 option. 5.1 available
LG	HB-965TZ	£600	+	1,100W	5.1	+	+	2/1	+	+	+	187	100000	Lovely flat speakers and excellent GUI
Panasonic	SC-BTT775	£400	+	1,000W	5.1	+	+	2/1	+	+	+	198	100000	A decent starter system for AV novices
Panasonic	SC-BTT350	£370	+	1,000W	5.1	+	+	0/1	+	+	+	190	100000	Sonics don't match the versatility
Panasonic	SC-BTT330	£350	+	1,000W	5.1	+	+	2/1	+	+	+	200	100000	Affordable surround sound, old net portal
Samsung	HT-D6750W	£800	+	1,300W	5.1	+	+	2/1	+	+	+	197	100000	Claims to be 7.1 but isn't
Samsung	HT-C9950W	£2,000	+	1,000W	7.1	+	+	2/1	+	+	+	190	100000	Perfect style match for Samsung's TVs
Samsung	HT-E6750W	£1,000	+	1,330W	5.1	+	+	2/1	+	+	+	208	100000	Valve tech adds some warmth to sonics
Sony	BDV-E370	£500	+	850W	5.1	+	+	0/1	+	+	+	187	100000	Good sound at low volume; SACD playback
Sony	BDV-E880	£400	+	1,000W	5.1	+	+	2/1	+	+	+	201	100000	Full of features but average audio

NEW ENTRY

Speakers



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Configuration	Front max power	Rear max power	Centre max power	Sub power	bookshelf	Issue	Rating	Comment
Acoustic Energy	Aegis Neo Max	£1,900	7.1	2 x 200W	2 x 170W	120W	200W	surr	199	12345	With 2 x 120W surrounds. An awful lot of speakers for the money
Acoustic Energy	Compact/Neo	£850	6.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	200W	all	201	12345	6.1 system offers solid sonics
Artcoustic	Spitfire	£21,500	7.5	2 x 250W	2 x 250W	250W	250W	no	200	12345	Plus 2 x 150W surrounds. Wall-mountable speakers with might
Boston Acoustics	A Series	£2,200	5.2	2 x 200W	2 x 200W	175W	250W	no	205	12345	Value for money; detail, scale
Bowers & Wilkins	800 Diamond	£22,500	5.1	2 x 500W	2 x 120W	300W	1,000W	no	196	12345	Breathtaking sound, bonkers price
Cambridge Audio	Minx S325	£800	5.1	2 x 75W	2 x 75W	75W	300W	all	195	12345	Extraordinary power for dinky size
Canton	Chrono CL	£3,600	5.1	2 x 200W	2 x 100W	140W	250W	rear	204	12345	Looks and sounds great
Canton	125 MX	£400	5.1	n/a	n/a	n/a	140W	all	203	12345	Coherent sound, fiddly connectors
Definitive Technology	Mythos XTR-50	£2,400	3.0	2 x 100W	n/a	100W	n/a	no	202	12345	Wall-mountable flatpanel speakers are a classy solution
Focal	Viva Utopia III	£61,000	5.2	2 x 600W	2 x 600W	600W	Passive	no	207	12345	Reference grade. Huge cabinets
Image Audio	IA 8/5/C	£4,000	5.0	2 x 150W	2 x 150W	300W	n/a	no	195	12345	Excellent flat panel speakers
Jamo	A 101 HCS 5	£250	5.1	2 x 70W	2 x 70W	70W	200W	all	205	12345	Budget package does the business
Jamo	S426 HCS3	£560	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 60W	90W	260W	rear	201	12345	Affordable floorstanding array
KEF	KHT-1505	£500	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	200W	all	205	12345	Compact system with agile sub
KEF	Q Series	£2,400	5.1	2 x 130W	2 x 120W	150W	200W	rear	203	12345	Trickle-down tech reaps rewards
MartinLogan	EM-ESL	£5,300	5.1	2 x 300W	2 x 200W	150W	300W	no	208	12345	Detailed, seamless sound. Ace
Monitor Audio	Gold GX	£7,150	5.1	2 x 200W	2 x 100W	200W	650W	no	202	12345	Gorgeous build and sonics
Paradigm	MilleniaOne	£2,500	5.1	2 x 50W	2 x 50W	50W	300W	all	201	12345	Premium-priced sub/sat package
Paradigm	CT100	£1,150	5.1	2 x 50W	2 x 50W	50W	100W	all	207	12345	Small cabinets, clean sound
PSB	Image Series	£1,500	5.1	2 x 200W	2 x 150W	150W	150W	rear	199	12345	Look great, sound tasty
Revel	Concerta	£3,400	5.1	2 x 150W	2 x 125W	150W	250W	no	206	12345	On-wall system, not cheap
Scandyna	Micropod SE/The Ball	£900	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	60W	all	200	12345	Quirky design married to hi-tech drivers = slick style system
Tannoy	Definition	£8,200	5.0	2 x 400W	2 x 350W	350W	n/a	rear	197	12345	Worth every penny. Bring on the sub
Tannoy	Mercury V	£1,100	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 50W	70W	300W	rear	207	12345	Value-for-money, mature design
Tannoy	HTS-101	£500	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	100W	all	203	12345	Solid-sounding surround package
Teufel	Theatre 200	£800	5.1	2 x 140W	2 x 150W	140W	250W	all	195	12345	Bold sats, sub suffers colouration
Q Acoustics	Q7000	£800	5.2	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	250W	all	204	12345	Class-leading sub/sat package

NEW ENTRY

5.1 CLASSIC HOME CINEMA SPEAKER LAYOUT...

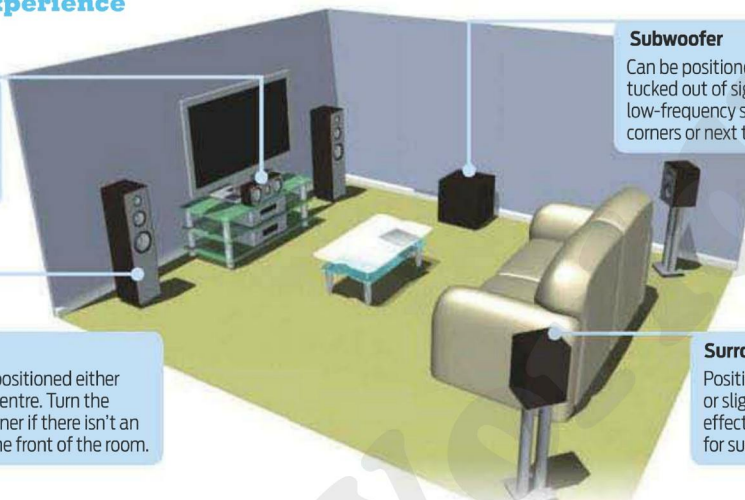
Follow these simple rules when laying out your system and you'll be guaranteed a great listening experience

Centre speaker

Handles most of the dialogue and onscreen effects. Should be positioned above or below the screen as close to it as possible.

Front speakers

Left and right speakers should be positioned either side of the screen, in line with the centre. Turn the speakers in slightly to face the listener if there isn't an even movement of sound across the front of the room.



Subwoofer

Can be positioned wherever it sounds best or can be tucked out of sight due to the non-directional nature of low-frequency signals. Be aware that close positioning in corners or next to walls can create a boomy effect.

Surround speakers

Position alongside the listener, pointing in or slightly behind the ears for a good surround effect. The back wall is not a good position for surrounds.

Projectors



NEW ENTRY

Manufacturer	Model	Price (Original)	Type	Resolution	3D	HDMI	Component	12V trigger	Fan noise/dB	Lamp life/hr	Issue	Rating	Comment
BenQ	W1100	£900	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	22	2,500	197	1 2 3 4 3	Dynamic images, noisy fan
BenQ	W1000+	£750	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	26	5,000	193	1 2 3 4 5	Performance transcends price
Casio	XJ-A235	£1,000	DLP	1280 x 800	+	1	0	0	29	20,000	192	1 2 3 4 5	LED/DLP hybrid. Poor pics
Epson	EH-TW3600	£1,300	LCD	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	22	4,000	193	1 2 3 4 5	Bright pics but average black levels
Epson	MG-850HD	£650	LCD	1,280 x 800	+	1	1	0	29	5,000	205	1 2 3 4 5	Offers iPod compatibility
Epson	EH-TW5900	£1,000	LCD	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	0	22	5,000	207	1 2 3 4 5	Great value 3D-ready 1080p PJ
Epson	EH-TW6000	£1,300	LCD	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	0	22	5,000	207	1 2 3 4 5	Better contrast than TW5900
InFocus	SP8600	£800	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	30	2,500	198	1 2 3 4 5	Excellent sub-£1k projector
InFocus	SP8604	£2,500	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	3	1	2	28	3,000	196	1 2 3 4 5	Versatile PJ with decent pictures
InFocus	SP8602	£3,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	3	3	28	2,500	182	1 2 3 4 5	Good pics with minor operating flaws
JVC	DLA-X3	£3,600	D-ILA	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	20	3,000	193	1 2 3 4 5	Aces 2D images, X-talk with 3D
JVC	DLA-X7	£5,550	D-ILA	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	20	3,000	195	1 2 3 4 5	Brightness and black level to die for
JVC	DLA-X70	£7,000	D-ILA	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	20	3,000	207	1 2 3 4 5	e-Shift tech buffs up 2D video
JVC	DLA-HD990	£9,000	D-ILA	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	19	3,000	185	1 2 3 4 5	Gorgeous with amazing black levels
Optoma	HD67N	£500	DLP	1280 x 720	+	1	2	0	29	3,000	194	1 2 3 4 5	With so-so 3D using a 3D-XL adapter
Optoma	HD20	£900	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	1	2	0	29	4,000	176	1 2 3 4 5	One of the first budget Full HD PJs
Optoma	HD83	£2,400	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	2	22	4,000	203	1 2 3 4 5	3D PJ suffers from limited brightness
Optoma	HD33	£1,350	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	25	4,000	204	1 2 3 4 5	Wallet-friendly model supports 3D
Panasonic	PT-AE4000	£2,500	LCD	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	22	2,000	177	1 2 3 4 5	Filmic pictures and easy to setup
Panasonic	PT-AT5000	£3,200	LCD	1920 x 1080	+	3	1	2	22	4,000	202	1 2 3 4 5	Good connectivity, superb images
Runco	LS-HB	£7,500	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	n/a	2,000	205	1 2 3 4 5	Brilliant PJ for bright environments
Runco	LS-5	£7,500	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	2	2	30	4,000	187	1 2 3 4 5	3-chip performance from one chip
Sanyo	PLV-Z4000	£1,800	LCD	1920 x 1080	+	2	2	1	19	3,000	191	1 2 3 4 5	Quiet. Yellow-ish but filmic images
Sharp	XV-Z17000	£4,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	0	n/a	n/a	196	1 2 3 4 5	Living room friendly, 3D impresses
SIM2	MICO 40	£11,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	2	n/a	30,000	189	1 2 3 4 5	Eco-friendly LED-lit and versatile
SIM2	C3X Lumis Uno	£19,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	3	32	2,500	184	1 2 3 4 5	Supreme pics but lacks manual iris
SIM2	Lumis 3D-S	£30,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	3	n/a	3,000	199	1 2 3 4 5	Reference level 3D projector
SIM2	Nero 3D-1	£13,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	3	n/a	3,000	206	1 2 3 4 5	Can't afford the Lumis 3D? Get this
Sony	VPL-VW90ES	£5,400	SXRD	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	22	n/a	192	1 2 3 4 5	Great option for a 3D CI build
Sony	VPL-VW85	£5,400	SXRD	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	20	3,000	174	1 2 3 4 5	Elderly but impressive SXRD PJ
Sony	VPL-HW20	£2,400	SXRD	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	0	20	n/a	190	1 2 3 4 5	Complex but capable of greatness
Sony	VPL-HW30ES	£3,100	SXRD	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	0	22	n/a	201	1 2 3 4 5	Sony's most affordable 3D offering
Sony	VPL-VW95ES	£5,000	SXRD	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	22	n/a	206	1 2 3 4 5	Excellent 2D image, but 3D has flaws
ViewSonic	Pro8200	£900	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	27	3,000	192	1 2 3 4 5	Falters with motion resolution
ViewSonic	Pro8450	£1,500	DLP	1280 x 1200	+	1	1	1	27	4,000	202	1 2 3 4 5	3D-ready business PJ lacks Full HD
Vivitek	H5080	£2,700	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	3	1	2	27	2,000	186	1 2 3 4 5	Excellent contrast and colour. Noisy

PROJECTOR SCREENS EXPLAINED...

FIXED FRAME OR ROLL AWAY?

When buying a projector, it's important to think about what screen you're going to partner it with. There are two main approaches – fixed-frame, where the screen is placed in a rigid frame and attached permanently to the wall, or 'roll-away' where it can be rolled up when not in use, including via neat, motorised systems. For the best picture quality and dedicated cinema rooms, fixed frame is preferable, as permanent screens generally stay more tautly stretched and deliver the most accurate pictures. Roll-away screens are more suited to when the room needs to double as a living room. Pricing, of course, varies depending on what size you need.

Editor's Choice...

EPSON

LCD → EH-TW5900
→ £1,000 Approx

The first Full HD 3D projector to launch cost around £5,000 – now Epson will sell you one for less than the price of a 50in TV. Yet while the EH-TW5900 is eminently affordable, it punches well above its weight. Both 2D and 3D pics impress, and setup is a doddle.

Tested: Issue 207

For more info visit: www.epson.co.uk



Media Players



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Type	HDD	3D	HDMI	DLNA	Online portal	USB playback	Wi-fi ready	Issue	Rating	Comment
AC Ryan	PlayOn! HD Essential	£130	Player	1TB	+	1	+	+	+	+	194	100%	No wired Ethernet option, so you have to network via wi-fi dongle
AC Ryan	PlayOn! HD 2	£150	Player	1TB	+	1	+	+	+	+	202	100%	Well featured and a good performer
Boxee	Boxee Box	£200	VOD	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	193	100%	iPlayer access. Browser is a pain to use
Buffalo	Linkstation Pro LS-VL	£170	NAS	1TB	+	+	+	+	+	+	192	100%	Speedy and reliable with Bit Torrent client. 1.5TB and 2TB versions are also available
Crystal Acoustics	PICOHD5.1	£50	Player	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	199	100%	Small, no frills media player
Crystal Acoustics	Media Matchbox	£55	Player	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	202	100%	Extensive file support includes lossless audio and BD ISOs. Keenly priced, ultra portable
Digital Stream	DPS-1000	£90	VOD	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	196	100%	Good for VOD services, no optical out
Iomega	StorCenter IX2-200	£215	NAS	2TB	+	0	+	+	+	+	182	100%	Pocket-sized powerhouse with handy one-touch USB copy
Iomega	Screenplay MX	£140	Player	1TB	+	1	+	+	+	+	194	100%	No optical audio out or hi-res audio
iXtreamer	iXtreamer	£150	NAS	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	199	100%	Slick player with space for SATA HDD
Netgear	NeoTV 550	£140	Player	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	199	100%	Solid offering but file support isn't comprehensive
Netgear	ReadyNAS NVX	£500	NAS	1TB	+	0	+	+	+	+	185	100%	Tank-like NAS can accommodate up to 8TB of storage – a serious bit of hardware
Popbox	Popbox 3D	£140	Player	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	199	100%	Offers BBC iPlayer and MKV3D file support
Sony	SMP-N100	£120	VOD	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	193	100%	Bravia Internet TV and streaming aplenty
Synology	USB Station 2	£85	Player	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	193	100%	Simply add your own USB hard disks
Synology	DS410	£400	Player	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	190	100%	Accommodates up to 8TB of SATA drives
Teufel	MediaStation 6	£270	Player	1TB	+	1	+	+	+	+	200	100%	Freeview HD totting player has hideous UI
Toshiba	Stor.E TV+	£170	Player	1TB	+	1	+	+	+	+	195	100%	Tosh's cute unit supports a wide range of formats
Verbatim	MediaShare	£130	NAS	1TB	+	1	+	+	+	+	188	100%	Stylish, well-featured NAS
WD	WD TV Live Hub	£200	Player	1TB	+	1	+	+	+	+	190	100%	Superb multi-format player
WD	WD TV Mini	£48	Player	+	+	0	+	+	+	+	189	100%	Tiny media player lacks HDMI output

HOME CINEMA

Choice

ISSUE
#210 ON SALE
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→ In the next issue

Onkyo in-depth We visit the AVR specialist's Japanese R&D labs

Next-gen TV Toshiba's 4K, autostereoscopic ZL2 flatscreen put to the test

The ultimate sci-fi movie marathon Can you survive our Blu-ray blow out?

→ On test

PANASONIC TX-P50VT50B Flagship Viera plasma **SONY BDP-S790** BD deck with 4K upscaling **CRYSTAL ACOUSTICS T2-5.2-UL** THX twin-sub speaker package **YAMAHA RX-V473** Affordable 5.1 receiver **MEDIA PLAYER GROUPTTEST** Four devices go head-to-head **PLUS** In-depth news, Blu-ray reviews and more

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Recorders



Manufacturer	Model	Price (*plus subscription)	Type	HDD/GB	HDMI	Component	Scart	USB Media	Online portal	Wi-fi ready	Issue	Rating	Comment
Panasonic	DMR-PWT500	£400	F'view HD	320	1	0	0	+	+	+	202	12345	BD/PVR combi needs bigger HDD
Echostar	HDS-600RS	£350	F'sat HD	500	1	0	2	+	+	-	196	12345	Solid PVR with built-in SlingPlayer feature
Panasonic	DMR-BWT700	£500	F'view HD	320	1	0	1	+	+	+	197	12345	Complex with Blu-ray recorder and 3D player
Sagemcom	DTR67320T	£150	F'view	320	1	1	2	+	-	-	201	12345	No HD tuners, but can import/export media
Samsung	BD-E8500	£400	F'view HD	500	1	0	0	+	+	+	207	12345	'Smart' PVR with 3D BD drive – v. convenient
Samsung	BD-DT7800	£280	F'view HD	500	1	1	0	+	+	+	201	12345	Can't record two channels at once
Sony	SVR-HDT1000	£350	F'view HD	1TB	1	0	0	+	-	-	204	12345	Large HDD; iPlayer but no Sony hub
Toshiba	HDR5010	£200	F'view HD	500	3	1	1	+	-	-	201	12345	Good twin-tuner offering, but no iPlayer yet
TVonics	DTR-Z500HD	£225	F'view HD	500	3	0	1	+	-	-	201	12345	Firmware has added BBC iPlayer

Subwoofers



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Sealed/ported	Power (RMS)	Frequency response/Hz	Driver size	Dimensions/ (w x h x d)mm	Weight/kg	Issue	Rating	Comment
BK Electronics	XXLS400DF	£410	S	400W	19-120	12in	400 x 460 x 400	28	196	12345	Clean and tight; great value
Bowers & Wilkins	DB1	£3,250	S	1,000W	17-45	12in x 2	460 x 490 x 410	44	197	12345	Bipolar arrangement, ripping
Paradigm	SUB1	£5,000	S	1,700W	35-150	8in x 6	505 x 516 x 455	50	197	12345	Unorthodox hexagonal shape
REL	G1	£3,300	S	600W	15@-6dB	12in	572 x 464 x 660	49	208	12345	Ultra potent; warm, rich sound
SV Sound	PC 12 Plus DSP	£1,250	P	800W	10-150	12.5in	1,022 x 407	39	198	12345	Cylindrical sub for big spaces
Tannoy	TS2.12	£550	S	500W	21@-6dB	12in	430 x 440 x 378	18	208	12345	Extra passive cone adds depth
Velodyne	DD18+	£5,800	S	1,250W	8.8-300	18in	530 x 580 x 650	65	197	12345	Huge 18in driver, muscular sound
Velodyne	EQ-Max12	£800	P	225W	25-120	12in	416 x 454 x 457	28	204	12345	EQ system makes placement easy
Velodyne	SPL-800 Ultra	£1,150	S	1,200W	16-240	8in	267 x 280 x 356	33	201	12345	Compact but potent; nice finish
Wharfedale	SPC-10	£300	S	215W	35-120	10in	352 x 382 x 305	11	202	12345	Affordable, but lacks grunt

NEW ENTRY

NEW ENTRY

Soundbars



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Power	Separate sub	Sub power	HDMI in	HDMI out	Dolby True HD	DTS HD MA	Dimensions/ (w x h x d)mm	Weight/kg	Issue	Rating	Comment
Bose	Cinemate ISR	£1,300	N/A	+	N/A	0	0	-	-	935 x 124 x 61	3.5	208	12345	Gutsy, but lacks HDMI jacks
LG	HLX-56S	£750	210W	+	150W	2	1	+	+	1000 x 95 x 207	6.8	204	12345	Stylish and full of features
Orbitsound	T12v3	£300	100W	+	80W	0	0	-	-	605 x 100 x 110	NA	206	12345	Wide stereo spread, no HDMI
Panasonic	SC-HTB520	£300	120W	+	120W	1	1	-	-	1002 x 80 x 50	2.5	199	12345	HDMI but no TrueHD/DTS-HD
Sharp	HT-SL150	£120	50W	+	50W	1	1	-	-	801 x 26 x 50	NA	207	12345	World's thinnest 'bar
Yamaha	YSP-2200	£800	132W	+	100W	3	1	+	+	435 x 137 x 350	6	196	12345	Effective surround sound

NEW ENTRY

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Hi Fi News, February 2012



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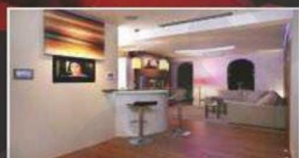
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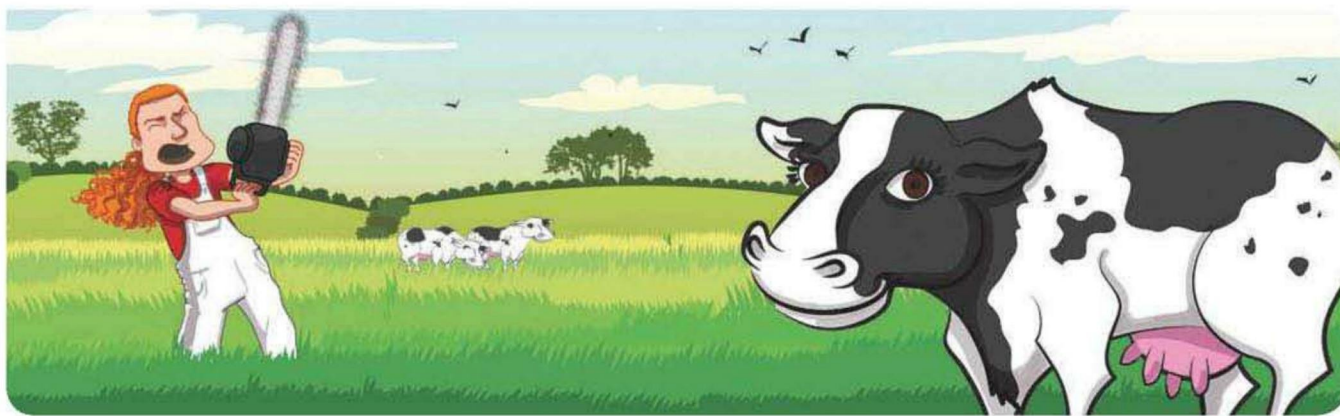
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POINT OF VIEW

Richard Stevenson applauds the BBC's new online arts venture – and says the doubters only have to look at the AV industry for proof it could work

I don't normally shout at the TV, and if I do it's only to encourage proponents of major sporting events, such as Foxy Boxing. It's rarely an outburst at the factual information programme *BBC News at Ten*. But on the launch day of the BBC's most forward-thinking initiative since iPlayer, the online arts platform The Space, I found myself in tooth-spitting form.

You see, I am quite a fan of 'the arts' generally, and even went to see *Macbeth* at Stratford once – although as the opening sequence didn't have quite the pace and drama of *Casino Royale*, nor any decent LFE action, I admit I fell asleep before anyone got knifed. Fine art has an even greater appeal. I am first in line for a Dali exhibition and have been round the Louvre three times – once in long trousers.

However, the arts industry is beset by pomposity and fact-blind pundits so far up their own orifice that you would need a Damien Hirst cross section just to see their face. In fact I just don't care much for contemporary artists like Mr Hirst, or pieces of art like Tracey Emin's infamous unmade bed. While I salute both artists for earning many millions of pounds from their endeavours, I can't help wondering if they sit at home at night thinking, 'I just can't believe I am getting away with this.'

Anyway, the VT narrated by the BBC's superbly eccentric Will Gompertz focused primarily on how The Space was a new digital platform aiming to revolutionize the way we consume the arts. Against a backdrop of rare John Peel footage, performing arts and theatre, The Space was portrayed as a vehicle to bring arts to the masses and open the whole concept to a wider audience. But for the sake of balanced reportage they wheeled out playwright David Edgar. He noted that if the performing arts are done digitally everyone will sit at home and watch it on TV, rather than going to the theatre. Our great national

institutions would no longer tour the country and that would be the death knell for live theatre.

While everyone is entitled to their opinion (obviously outside of this column) Edgar's view is so misguided you just know he is a Damien Hirst fan. For instance, **back in the day of VHS and Betamax you had to wait over a year for a movie to be available on either format**, sometimes longer. The opinion among film producers was that if people could watch movies at home they would no longer go to out the cinema and that would be downfall of the movie industry.

Fast-forward 30 years through VHS, DVD, Blu-ray, 3D and more ways to access movie content at home than ever before and where is the film industry? According to IBISWorld research, in 2012 worldwide movie production is expected to top \$127 billion, up 1.4% for the year. Last year UK box offices alone took over £1bn in revenue in the midst of a recession and recorded the best admissions figures since 1971. The very same is true of the music industry, which has experienced constant year-on-year growth in live gig attendance since the advent of the industry's supposed nemesis, MP3.

A help not a hindrance

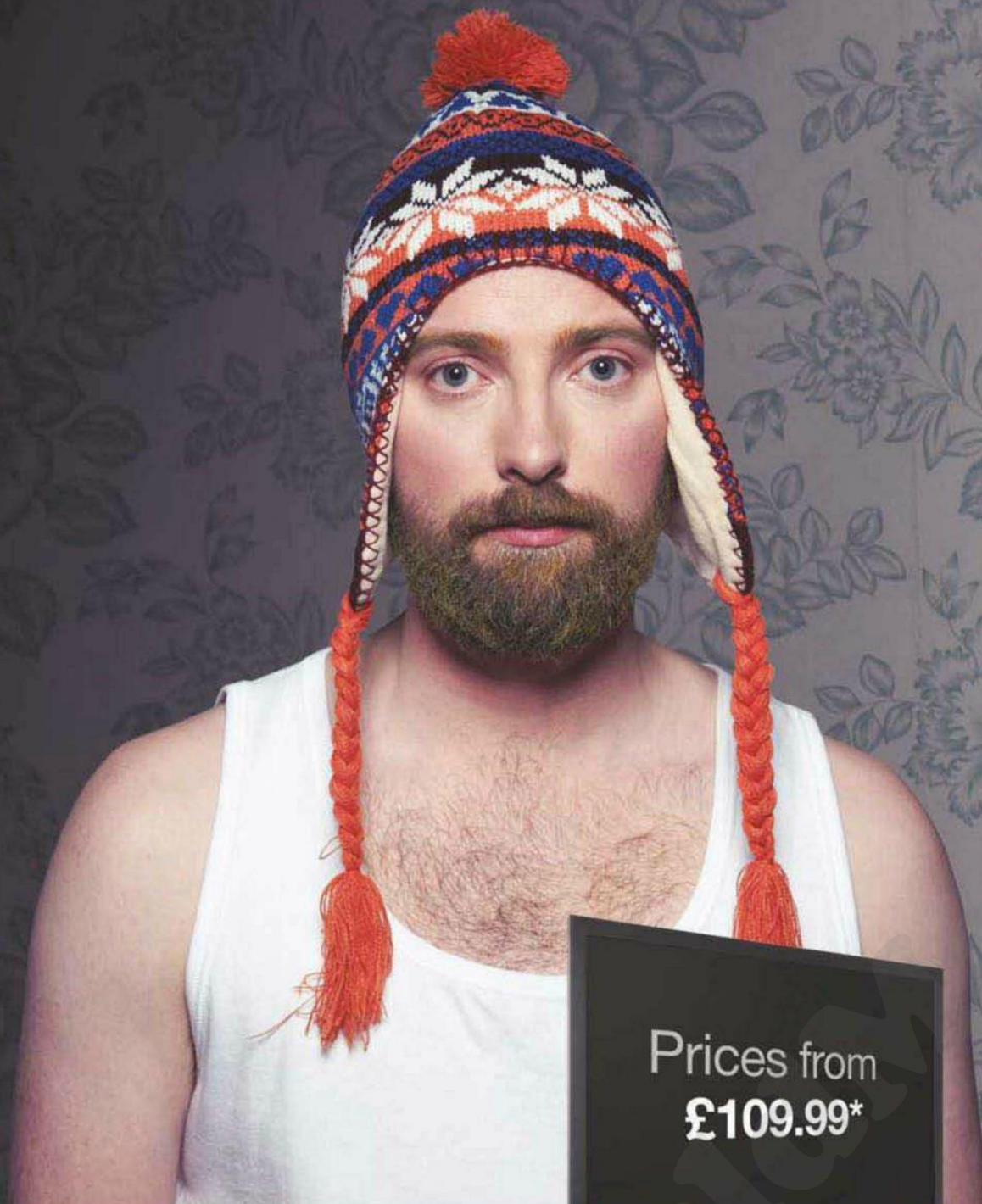
The fact is that high-quality digital distribution of media actually grows awareness of the arts, and with it public enthusiasm to attend live events. The Space is an absolutely brilliant idea from the BBC and, far from denigrate the theatre industry, I expect it to bolster box office numbers throughout the UK. I'm confident that its six-month trial will see it become one of the world's leading digital hubs for all forms of the arts. Except Damien Hirst, because he is just as rubbish on television ●

*Do you go out to the cinema less than you used to?
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Richard Stevenson is currently slicing through his collection of amplifiers in preparation for his new AVArt exhibition



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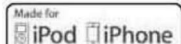
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